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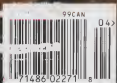
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Essay Contest: Part Two.

LAST ISSUE I RAN THE WINNING essay in my late and apparently unlamented essay contest, and promised that I would run the runners-up in succeeding issues. Good to my word, I present the First Runner-Up, an essay that seems to draw directly from my also late-but-somewhat-more-lamented Why Do You Read Fantasy survey. The author, Rick Norwood, is in fact a Science Fiction writer, and he offers some interesting insights into both genres. Enjoy.

LOST STARS

The scientific method applies to Science Fiction.

The scientific method: You make observations; on the basis of those observations, you make a prediction; then you test that prediction by making new observations.

On the basis of reading *Year's Best SF 1* and 2, edited by David G. Hartwell, I made the following predictions about *Year's Best SF 3*.

1. Most of the stories would be set on Earth.
2. Most of the stories would be set in the past, present, or near future.
3. Most of the stories would be about ordinary people.
4. Most of the stories would be about problems that could not be solved.
5. Most of the stories in which a problem is solved would involve mindless violence.

How different this is from the Science Fiction I grew up reading in *Astounding*, and in the novels of Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke. Practically the definition of a Science Fiction story in those days was: In a future when space travel is commonplace, a sympathetic character is faced with a problem that he (it was almost always he) solves by using his wits.

The blurb for *Year's Best SF 3* reads, "all new astounding stories" and I began reading, wondering how many of the stories would fit the *Astounding* definition of Science Fiction, and how many would fit my rather gloomy prediction.

Here is the outcome of that experiment.

There are 22 stories in all.

Of these, 16 are set on Earth and one (the Benford) seems to be set on Earth but you can't really tell. Of the others, two are set aboard spaceships, one on the Moon, one on Venus, and one on a planet of a distant star. Of the two stories set on spaceships, the

Bradbury spaceship could be a modern cruise ship with no essential change in the setting. The "story" set on Venus is a joke. In the only setting with an other-world flavor, more than half of the story takes place in a computer simulation of Earth's past.

Is there anything wrong with this? Not really, if the stories are good, and several of them are very good, though some of them are surprisingly bad. But there is something wrong with Science Fiction when, year after year, most of the best stories have settings that are familiar and everyday.

How did I do with my second prediction?

Of the 22 stories, 16 are set in the present or the near future, and one (the Newman) is set in a never-never land of mixed past and present. Five are set in the middle to far future, but of these five, three are set on an Earth where civilization has either stagnated or collapsed entirely, and the other two are set in a far future where our worst nightmares have come to pass. I can't imagine anyone wanting to live in futures like these.

Well, what's wrong with an occasional downbeat story? Nothing. But there is something wrong with Science Fiction when most of the stories, year after year, predict a future in which humanity's worst impulses triumph, a future much worse than our present.

On to the third prediction.

Of the 22 stories, 14 are about ordinary or sub-ordinary people and one (the Gibson) has no people in it at all. Of the stories that are about extraordinary people, two are about mythic heroes, one is about a nerd who appears ordinary but will someday win a Nobel Prize, one is about a terrorist, and one is about Death. Only two are about people who are recognizably human but who are able to do extra-ordinary things. One of these two (the Egan) is my favorite story in the book.

My fourth prediction was that, contrary to the old definition of Science Fiction, most of the characters would fail to do anything to solve their own problems.

Of the 22 stories, in 14 the characters, if there are any, do not solve their problems, if they have any. In a couple of these, the characters triumph by accepting their problems and living with them, which is a victory of sorts, especially in a genre in which victories are rare.

Continued on page 70

REALMS OF FANTASY

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Dear Ms. McCarthy:

These are the stories I liked the best out of the 1999 ROF issues:

(1) "Arthur's Wishes" by Tim Meyers—I wouldn't have thought any story would have something new to say about Arthur and Morgan Lefay, but this one made me feel like I was meeting these characters for the first time.

(2) "Dragons and Other Extinctions" by Patrick Weekes—mixed a strong sense of adventure with serious thoughts about differences between groups.

(3) "The Girl Who Loved Fire" by K.D. Wentworth—overcame a clinker of a title to be utterly imaginative, suspenseful, gripping, and tragic.

(4) "A Brother Grimm" by Sten Westgard—very good 19th-century atmosphere in this most different look at fairy tales.

(5) "A Damsel in Distress" by E.A. Johnson—clever story that managed to tweak both the conventions of this story and its readers.

(6) "Glamour" by Bruce Glassco—fine example of how Fantasy can illuminate situations in real life.

(7) "The Giant's Tooth" by Bruce Colville—witty and fun story that made the best of its unusual premise.

(8) "Salley Harpe" by Christopher Rowe—fine characterization and atmosphere, as well as an unusual supernatural premise.

(9) "Fortitude" by Andy Duncan—very well-done twisting of reality into a Fantasy story.

(10) "Jordan's Waterhammer" by Joe Mastrotianni—more SF than Fantasy, but a gripping story.

(11) "Dusi" by Devon Monk—good humor.

(12) "Bitter Chivalry" by Darrell Schweitzer—best of his revisionist Arthurian stories that I have read.

Other notables were "Dragon of Conspiracy," "A Ghost of a Chance," "Baptism on Bittersweet Creek," "The Hounds of Winter," "Raney's Hounds," "Chenting in the Land of the Dead," "Aftershock," and "The Witch's Child."

Sincerely,
Michael Samerdyke
Wise, VA

Thanks once again for taking the time to let us know which stories and authors you have enjoyed this past year at Realms.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,
Gahan Wilson "sorely underappreci-

ated!!!!" How unjust is this world? His name on the cover first drew me to *Realms* long ago. I find myself reading about authors and books I'd otherwise have no interest in, just because of his insights and enthusiasm—great writing.
Marie Barrett
Northampton, MA

We agree—Gahan is certainly one of our favorite writers here at Realms, and he does have a knack for widening one's horizons.

Dear *Realms* of Fantasy,

This is a letter in response to those who berate the artistry of this magazine, specifically the "practically nude warrior chicks that grace the cover on occasion." Please don't tell me you are actually wasting valuable time considering what these goofballs have to say. If these people are truly offended by some scantily clad cartoon women, then I suggest they quickly find the biggest closet in their house, go into the deepest, darkest corner of that closet, shut the door and lock it, because they are obviously not ready to face the real world.

This age of political correctness is slowly eroding freedom of thought and creativity. I am hoping that a magazine devoted to Fan-

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tasy will not cave in to this pompous agenda. Please do not fall into this trap, but instead try to maintain some integrity. With the laws and restrictions in place today, it seems that the written word is the only part of the media the first amendment applies to. This may seem a petty, even sexist thing to argue for, but any legitimate freedom denied, no matter how well intended, is a step backward—not forward.

Shawn Wood
Charlotte, NC

Well, somehow I never equated medieval wonderbras with integrity—but certainly censorship of any sort is a serious subject for the media and the arts. Because we cannot please everyone all the time—we certainly value, and publish, a myriad opinions—yours included. I do not think publishing those opinions on a "Letters" page is tantamount to "wasting valuable time" or "an erosion of freedom." We like to contemplate what all of our readers have to say—yourself included. In any case, thanks for the input ... and you might be interested to read our next letter involving censorship.

Dear Gahan Wilson and all at *Realms*,

Thought you might be interested to know that there is a growing faction of parents in our middle school (involving the fourth grade mostly), that is questioning a teacher's reading of the Harry Potter series. They have decided the subject matter of the books

(witchcraft and magic) is inappropriate and that the books might actually influence children toward an unhealthy interest in such matters. I have found that my 10-year-old daughter is transfixed by the story ... even waking up early in the morning before school to read, and reading it on her own, ahead of the teacher, because she wants to get on to the next book. I say that if reading so much is "unhealthy," then so be it. Perhaps some parents' attention might be better focused if they monitored their kid's Pokemon exposure ... or television watching. Thanks for letting me "spout off" here—although I imagine readers of *Fantasy* are a little more evolved than the average, illiterate parent "lynch mob."

Judith Estes
Massachusetts

Dear Terri Windling,

Thank you for your superb column in *Realms of Fantasy*—and welcome back. You have been missed. Not only was your column erudite and entertaining as always, but if I may inject a personal note—came as a reminder that a recent desert of my own may have been a necessary journey, and that there is healing and rebirth as well as pain. Also wanted to mention that the use of the Boulet paintings was brilliant!

Sincerely,
Anne McConney
Omaha, NE

Dear Shawna,

I was rather appalled at the reactionary letter published in your August issue written by Brittany Thompson of Fullerton, CA., concerning premechanical Fantasy writing. Does Brittany realize that steam power was actually harnessed by the Greek inventor Archimedes before the Second Punic War in 8C 218? That would put the Crusades and the "Song of Roland" (and even the mythology of King Arthur) well into what might be called "mechanical" eras. What about water clocks, and the complex processes used in creating a medieval knight's armor and weapons?

I sympathize with and understand the purist point of view, but the whole thing boils down to how expansive your views of Fantasy are and whether you perceive yourself as a part of the continuum that is history or as a fragment of human history belonging to a particular era or generation, such as "Modern America, 1999," or the "X-generation," or the "Baby-Boomers," which all will, alas, pass the seasons.

I think all historical eras are rich settings for Fantasy.

Mark C. Runyon
Columbia, MO

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to: shawnam896@aol.com

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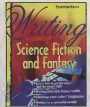
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ONE OF THE MOST HARDY AND BRACING OF ALL THE GRAND THEMES OF FANTASY FICTION must surely be that of the psychic detective. No other form in the genre offers the writer more gorgeous opportunities to firmly grab hold of the reader's fully enthralled attention from the very first line, to haul them by their terrified necks through every word of every page written and then to deposit them gently back into their cozy armchairs at the end of the saga, not only fully satisfied at having been treated to a rousing rowdy adventure, but also to be deeply grateful to the author for demonstrating that even if the most god awful entities or events do somehow manage to manifest themselves in this troubled world of ours there does exist the possibility of the arrival of a hero—who knows? Perhaps the reader himself could do the job if properly inspired!—who could somehow manage to subdue every monster risen, crush and cleanse away all damage caused by their evil machinations, and restore the whole wide world to the comfortable and comforting conditions it enjoyed before the horrid intrusion occurred.

Dark Detectives—Adventures of the Supernatural Sleuths,

Psychic detectives abound in Dark Detectives—Adventures of the Supernatural Sleuths, a collection of short stories compiled by Stephen Jones.

(Fedogan & Bremer, Minneapolis, MN; 395 pp., hardcover; \$29.00) edited by the redoubtable and apparently tireless Stephen Jones, skillfully offers us a particularly fine sampling of this sort of thing in the form of a kind of two-pronged attack which combines a first-rate anthology of short stories featuring the fearless activities of some of the most heroic and renowned psychic sleuths who ever encountered and dispatched the most horrid (it is impossible to avoid superlatives and still keep the appropriate mood when one's discussing this fictional arena) supernatural menaces ever faced, and what amounts to a brand-new book by that dashing master of perilous pastiche, Kim Newman, who here temporarily abandons his continuing (at least I certainly hope they are continuing!) brilliantly clever takeoffs of Bram Stoker's king vampire Dracula to play skillfully with themes created by that same master in his seldom-read novel of evilly-surviving mummies and long-lasting Egyptian curses: *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*.

The book starts out with an Introduction by Jones, *The Serial Sleuths*, which I strongly recommend to anyone wishing a solid primer on the fiction dealing with intrepid investigators of spooky doings. He not only offers a background on the brave detectives who have adventures included in the book, he generously gives us a very good basic history of the field in general which manages to introduce and entertainingly discuss most of its more renowned authors and the dashing phantom fighters they've created.

The short stories in the book are a mix of solidly established if not downright classic detectives, relatively recent investigators with still-developing careers and a sprinkling of brand-new snoops, some of them in second showings following up their first appearance in a prior anthology of Jones's, *Shadows Over Innsmouth*.

The most venerable of the detectives is Carnacki, "the ghost finder," who was created right after the turn of our very recently departed century by the very talented but rather strange William Hope Hodgson, perhaps best known for his supernatural novels of the sea. Carnacki is a prime exponent of bringing supernatural investigation up to date and "The Horse of the Invisible" starts out with a very, very spooky bit of photographic evidence.

The next most senior investigator is Solar Pons but the short story in this book featuring him is not written by his



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original creator, the brash young August Derleth who—I learned to my horror for the first time from Jones's intro—"created" him after Conan Doyle very firmly rejected his request that he be allowed to continue writing the Sherlock Holmes stories now that Doyle had opted to quit the series. I always knew that Augie had chutzpah, but this is really something special. In any case, good old Basil Copper takes up the pen for "The Adventure of the Crawling Horror" and writes a jolly good story with it about a ghastly something inhabiting a creepy marsh.

The third-most elderly is a character who has always been a very particular favorite of mine, John Thunstone. Thunstone was created by Manly Wade Wellman, bless his heart, and a large part of my affection for this particular hero is that he's a dead ringer for Manly, and so reading any of the stories concerning him always clearly and easily conjures up the image of a dear friend now otherwise lost. "Rouse Him Not" is a relatively minor adventure of Thunstone's, but I was thrilled to come across it since it was new to me, and it may be new to you.

Other older reliables are Brian Lumley with his Titus Crow and R. Chetwynd-Hayes with his Francis St. Claire and Frederica Masters, and among the more or less younger lot are such stellar performers as Clive Barker with his Harry D'Amour, Jay Russell with his Marty Burns, and Neil Gaiman who has for the second time made use of Lon Chaney Junior as Lawrence Talbot, and I wish I'd thought of that.

All of them are great fun.

The Newman book, for such it really is, has been slyly interspersed among these other offerings and it works because it is a novel in the form of a series of short stories all of which feature daring defiers of the dark, most of which loyal readers of Newman will have met before.

As Jones points out, this Seven Stars exercise is, among other things, an effort to straighten up and organize the sometimes very complicated relationships and historical positionings between these characters which have been formed during Newman's previous writings, and I feel this has given the story a somewhat more serious mood than what is usual with his work. There are many hilarious events and juxtapositions, to be sure, but the tone is overall a bit grimmer than usual.

This by no means stands in the way of its being highly entertaining. The episodes build in a highly effective fashion (I strongly suggest you read them at a swoop, separately from the rest of the collection) and you will not only be treated to highly exciting new doings on the parts of trusty reliables such as Charles Beauregard, Edwin Winthrop, Catriona Kaye, Sally Rhodes, Richard Jeperson, and Genevieve Dieudonne, but will encounter the usual rich mix of familiar figures, real and imaginary, this particular lot including John Barrymore,



Pai-net'em, Inspector Lestrade, John Carra-dine, Dr. Shade, Peter Lorre, Mycroft Holmes, Menephtah HI, a Gustav von Seyffertitz impersonator and, of course, the peripatetic Jewel of the Seven Stars, itself.

That should damn well hold you.

I have to confess that, by and large, I get very little sustenance from books and movies trying to scarefully entertain me with an account of the Devil and how he tried to destroy us all and how he was bested in the end.

It took me quite a while to figure out why this kind of entertainment usually succeeds often in making me mull over what restaurant we should go to after we leave the theater or causes me to be grateful rather than annoyed when the cat jumps into my lap for a petting and shoves the book aside, but I think I finally solved the mystery.

My first notion was that the things were too predictable, but I dropped it with a blush when it occurred to me that there is no fable I more childishly enjoy than the telling and retelling of that rigid legend concerning the vampire, how he came to be well and properly staked and his evil turned to bones and flaking dust.

My best present guess is that I find myself put off by the majority of these sagas by the fact that the Devil is usually shown opposed to the full attack of some powerfully organized worldwide religion, all of whose members know for certain they are backed to the hilt and gorgeously empowered by an almighty God whose holy word assures them that they are absolutely bound to prevail in the end.

It is an entirely different situation than Dracula's being pestered only by one dotty old doctor who finds it more than a little difficult to persuade even a tiny group of heroes that his wacky brand of alternative medicine is really appropriate for persistent blood loss. The whole setup in the usual Devil stories is a grotesque mismatch which makes it abundantly clear that his campaign is transparently

feckless and that—for all his nasty doings and spectacular special effects—he is a pathetic loser from the start. The fight is fixed.

But now a Devil book called *The Talisman* (Ash-Tree Press, BC, Canada; 209 pp.; hardcover, \$40.00). It has expertly avoided all of these objections, removed the cloying smugnesses which all too often stultifies the format, and completely won my heart.

I confess I might not have even started reading it at all if it had not come from the highly reliable Ash-Tree Press, and I freely admit that its having a jacket illustration by Jason C. Eckhardt strongly prejudiced me in its favor, but once I'd tiptoed a paragraph or two into its marvelously creepy Prologue, I realized that I was firmly hooked and I ended up reading the whole thing in one sitting, gently but firmly brushing the increas-



ingly cranky cat from my lap an uncounted number of times.

Starting from his Prologue on, Ayckiffe adroitly, and by means of many subtle techniques, sees to it that *The Talisman* removes the moldering heap of obscurifications draped over the devil as he is usually presented in these epics by making the most frightening thing about the notion of the creature abundantly clear: It and its powers are appallingly ancient.

If we hope to even dimly grasp the scariness of the notion of the Devil we must understand it has been lurking on Earth for untold aeons (a favorite phrase from Lovecraft which I cannot resist using whenever the opportunity presents itself) before the various religions which currently believe in it even came into existence. The Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, and all the rest are mere Johnny-come-latelys. Even worse: He has seen many other such enemies come and go before. He has observed them arrive, noted their posturings and threats, then watched them fade away into collapsed cities buried under heaps of sand or the twining vines of jungles.

Besides establishing that simple teaching, Aycliffe ensures that we view the Devil from a more mortally human point of view than is usually taken by seeing to it that in his novel all opposition to this remarkably evil being comes from secular, sometimes even anti-religious folk. From people who are, in short, totally out of their depth in such a confrontation.

The bulk of these innocent protagonists in *The Talisman* are scholars, mostly of an archaeological bent, all of them are degreed and well published and a good many are viewed with great respect by the scholarly powers. Unfortunately for them, the novel demonstrates that they are all—from the well-intentioned all the way down to the very evilly disposed—tossing with forces that they know a great deal about and of which they understand practically nothing.

During a dig in Iraq in the ancient city of Babil, otherwise sometimes known as Bab at-Uyun or "the Gate of the Eyes" or Babylon, American archaeologists Edward and Caroline Monelli come across hidden chambers filled with sand piled over the shriveled bodies of many children and a dark statue "tall as a youth" with a man's body, a horned beast's head and great black wings rising from its shoulders.

After the ominous and untimely deaths of the Monellis, the statue, now in London, comes under the care of Thomas Alton, who is recently associated with the British Museum. Thomas and his wife Nicola—who went suddenly blind for no known reasons some years ago—and her troubled son Adam, have recently moved into an old house in Bloomsbury that is full of secrets and which belonged to another scholar, Peter Lazend, who also went inexplicably blind during the last years of what seems to have been a very strange life.

Thomas has the statue stored in the museum, but this does not lessen its influence over the little family or the house, which more and more seems to have been polluted by Lazenby's activities. A Christmas goes oddly wrong, as does a birthday party. Something blind with a little bell moves about the halls at night leaving a spicy scent behind.

Many troubling themes interweave in the story. Blindness, and not just the physical kind, works powerfully throughout. The vulnerability of children and the possibility of a kind of childish innocence in extreme evil. The survival of the darkest kinds of sorcery involving both death and birth.

One of the most marvelous gifts granted by *The Talisman* is the chance it gives us to meet and get to know a little about the remarkable Ali Baba whose real name is Bahram Safa'i. The last of a long line of magicians, he was born in Shariz in Iran where Hafiz of the "golden tongue" is buried, but he has become "a refugee who has lost all hope of restoration" and lives in the basement of a Persian restaurant called the Tah-Dik in Kensington. There is altogether too lit-

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tle of Bahram in the book (but of course, at the same time, there is just exactly enough) and I do truly hope that the author will take mercy and somehow let us visit him again.

All in all, this is one of the best books of its kind I've ever read.

The Fox Woman (by Kij Johnson; Tor Books, NYC; hardcover, 384 pp.; \$24.95) is a charming novel based on the ancient and classic Japanese fairy tale of a young female fox who is growing up quite reasonably as the small, furry animal she is when—in this book it sensibly takes place on a misty morning—she catches a glimpse of a nobleman, becomes obsessed with him, and sets out to win his love.

Kij Johnson first wrote a short story on this theme and when she was given the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for it she was, I'm happy to say, encouraged to write the present work. In it she has done a highly successful job of expanding the notion and letting it produce complications which are both poetic and logical.

Of course the little fox's ambition involves her becoming a human and that, in turn, involves a great deal of magic, all of it very exotic Japanese-style magic which turns out to be as tricky and full of catches as any bunch of Western hoodoo pocus.

The book and mood of both a fox's den and that of medieval Japan and what might happen were they to somehow wondrously intermix is very convincingly and beautifully

conveyed. The writing is very skillfully stylized for this purpose and is sensitively interspersed and supported by lovely poetry.

As one who is primarily a visual artist I'd like to point out that whilst reading *The Fox Woman* I found myself, again and again, having marvelously clear flashes of what this or that scene described actually looked like. I don't know if it's because Kij Johnson worked some sly magic into her stylish prose or because her obviously deep research triggered my internal image bank or it's a little of both, but all those hallucinations were lots of fun and I hope you get something of the same effect should you choose to read the book. Which you should.

Gahan Wilson

Fashions come and go in literature, and the Fantasy genre is no exception. It's been a long time since the whimsical, gentle melancholy of Robert Nathan's type of quiet tale has been popular. But perhaps the recent Tachyon Press reissue of Nathan's *Portrait of Jennie* (1939) portends a new appreciation of such calm and meditative fantasies. The Nathan reprint features an appreciation by Peter Beagle, whose own work (see below) often occu-



pies this too-little-visited corner of Fairland.

A second signpost toward such a revival is the appearance of an excellent first novel in the Nathan/Beagle vein: Paul LaFarge's *The Artist of the Missing* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux; trade, 241 pp.; \$13.00). LaFarge's story begins with the arrival of two young men named Frank and James in a nameless city of quirky marvels. Fresh from the country, the friends share a bright-eyed appreciation of this odd metropolis where puppeteers rate their own special cemetery and the relatives of mysteriously vanished citizens congregate expectantly night after night on a lonely beach. Frank, our hero, soon develops both a love affair with a photographer named Prudence, and an artistic talent for sketching the missing from verbal descriptions. But his charitable drawings soon bring him up against the capricious and vengeful authorities. Here the story takes a Kafkaesque turn, yet without plunging into Kafka's darker gloom. How Frank survives ill fortune and what becomes of his quest for Prudence, who has inexplicably joined the missing, form the second half of this affecting yet stoic book.

As a pre-teen reader, one of my favorite books was the Newbery-Award-winning *It's*

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The Archer King, by Reyna Thera Lorele, Blue Arrow Books, softcover, \$21.95. The tale of Robin Hood reborn. Herein is the story of Robert of Loxley and the orphan raised in a convent, Maid Marian. Come once again to Sherwood Forest, unlock the mysteries of the Druids, and fall in love with the rebel outlaw. A rollicking, adventure-laced book replete with mischief, romance, and a spirit rekindled. A familiar tale made anew for those who love the Robin Hood adventures and who wish to revisit ... and be charmed and enthralled.

The Renegade Dragon (The Dragon Nimbus History #3), by Irene Radford, DAW Books, paperback, \$6.99. Enemies within, enemies without ... threaten to destroy the kingdom of Coronnan. Dragon magic had been vital yet personally devastating to Nimbusland, in the battles that had come before. A wonderful and magical tale for those who love dragon lore. Irene Radford, author of *The*



Dragon Nimbus series, *The Dragon Nimbus History* series, and *Merlin's Descendants* brings her readers into a Fantasy land of compelling adventure and forbidden technologies. King Quinntault is under attack in his own reign and the head of the Commune of Magicians plots to bring all magical power within his grasp. Read on to the place where no dragon dares fly ...

The Mammoth Book of Comic Fantasy II, edited by Mike Ashley, Carroll and Graf, trade paperback, \$10.95. Sequel to the ever-popular *Mammoth Book of Comic Fantasy*—lovers of both fantasy and laughter will find much to delight within the pages of this collection. Stories by Harlan Ellison, Ambrose Bierce, Terry Jones, and Alan Dean Foster, to name but a sampling, fill the pages with amusing tales, some published here for the first time. Mike Ashley is the editor of more

than 40 books, including *The Mammoth Book of Fairy Tales*, and this, his newest edition, is full of "magic and mayhem."

Darksong Rising, by L.E. Modesitt, Tor hardcover, \$27.95. The third book of *The Spellsong Cycle*. The continuing saga of Anna, former singer and music teacher from Iowa, turned magician and agent. In this innovative world that Modesitt has created, music is magic. Anna must face enemies both domestic and foreign, applying all she has gleaned in previous battles and political hardship. Even the now-mighty Anna has come to learn that the cost of practicing magic is a high one and not always the complete solution. A fantasy adventure such as this, filled with realistic characters, powerful magic, and political intrigue should not be missed.

Xena, Warrior Princess: The Empty Throne, by Ru Emerson, Berkley Boulevard, paperback, \$5.99. Can't get enough of Xena on television? This book is for you! An all-new and original Xena adventure is contained herein. A nameless village and armed bands running rampant in the streets. Xena and Gabrielle must prevail before they, too, vanish into the night.



Like This, Cat, by Emily Neville (1963). This affecting story of a sensitive young city boy on the verge of maturity whose best friend is his cat naturally appealed to me. I now suspect that Peter Beagle might have encountered and been touched by this fine novel sometime in his own past. At least the emotional and basic rudiments, effects of Beagle's newest, *Tamsin* (Roc; 275 pp.; hardcover; \$21.95), conform to Neville's classic.

Jennifer—Jenny-Gluckstein—is a thirteen-year-old resident of New York, living with her divorced mom Sally and indispensable feline pal Mister Cat, when her world is turned upside-down. Sally has the temerity to fall in love with an Englishman named Evan, and before you can say "Goodbye Empire State," Jenny finds herself uprooted and transplanted to a moldering Dorset farm. There, she begins to encounter the supernatural, denizens of the ancient countryside, culminating in her friendship with Tamsin Willoughby, ghost of the young daughter of the first owners of the farm. Tamsin died tragically, as did her lover, Edric. But the exact circumstances of their deaths are a long time in being revealed. When Jenny finally unravels the mystery, she finds herself plunged into the middle of a deadly centuries-old lovers' triangle. But before arriving at the harrowing climax, you share many wonderful quotidian moments with Jenny, Mister Cat, and her new family, including two disparate brothers.

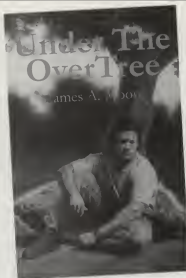
Beagle adopts a wonderful narrative device, having Jenny's nineteen-year-old wiser self compose the account of her earlier magical adventures. The two voices of Jenny flow and mingle in clever and appealing ways. Beagle eschews sentimentality and bathos, instead delivering subtle wisdom and genuine catharsis. And because he's been writing of ghosts for 40 years now, since *A Fine and Private Place* (1960), it's no surprise that his handling of the supernatural is sophisticated and believable.

Like the work of Susan Cooper and Lloyd Alexander, this is a YA novel that transcends age and genre, a future classic for sure.

Robert Heinlein, Fantasy writer? Such a conjunction seems most unlikely—until one recalls that wonderful modern fairy-tale entitled *Glory Road* (1963), and the mysticism of *I Will Fear No Evil* (1970). Never given to Fantasy in the actual Tolkien mode (after all, Heinlein was a fully formed writer long before Tolkien's debut), Heinlein nevertheless was open to employing non-rational interpretations of the universe in several of his fictions.

Now editor David Hartwell has done us the service of compiling *The Fantasies of Robert Heinlein* (Tor; 362 pp.; hardcover; \$27.95), a volume which collects all Heinlein's shorter fantasies. There's a bit of creative blurring involved, since a couple of these items ("All You Zombies," "Waldo," "—And He Built a Crooked House") have long been firmly embedded in the SF canon.

Continued on page 73



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BY MARTY BAUMANN

So, you think you'll find social commentary in vampire films? Bite me!

IN RECENT FILMS SUCH AS *BLADE*, *THEY SPORT LEATHER*, *MYRIAD PIERCINGS*, AND *THRASH* about to bad dance music in cavernous basement nightclubs. Hong Kong action sagas, such as Tsui Hark's *Mr. Vampire*, depict them hopping along like frogs in single-file formation, controlled by a magic parchment attached to the forehead. The image that stubbornly resides in the minds of most Americans, however, is that of the swarthy nobleman, brilliant hair and opera cape shimmering in the gaslight, seducing a maid with a rolling, Slavic accent. Vampires come in a terrific variety of shapes and accouterments and, in one grisly guise or another, they've haunted darkened cinemas almost since the form was born.

Les Vampires, for instance, a primitive French action serial lensed in 1915, was a stunning popular success. It had nothing to do with the supernatural, but its protagonists, a nocturnal band of super-criminals, wore black leather bodysuits and hoods skulking along the Paris rooftops in the moonlight. The bloodsucking was absent, but the inspiration was clear. This neo-expressionist imagery lives today in the form of such films as *Blade*, *John Carpenter's Vampires*, and any number of TV series and comic books.

The first, full-blooded movie vampire was Count Graf Orlok, as portrayed by German actor Max Shreck in the silent classic *Nosferatu* (1922). The film is positively baroque in its presentation, starkly lit, stagily acted (nothing unusual for a silent film), and flagrantly grotesque. But 77 years after its initial release it remains just about

the best vampire movie ever made.

Director F.W. Murnau called his film "a symphony of shadows," and no better description comes to mind. Pensive, haunting scenes of Orlok's ghastly shadow slithering along walls are but one of the film's many visual highlights, the most prominent of which is Max Shreck himself. Even when compared with today's gore-film icons (Freddy Kruger, Pinhead, et al.), themselves by-products of a jaded generation that's seen it all, Shreck is positively repulsive. He's a human rat with sunken eyes, white skin, pointed ears, bulbous head, and snaggle teeth. If you were to tell me that the scrawny actor actually was a vampire, I'd have little trouble believing it.

All of the vampire film trappings and conventions are in place—the treacherous coach ride to the ancient castle, the superstitious natives, the bats, the rats, the wolves, the vulnerable maidens succumbing to the vampire's hypnotic presence. Obviously, Murnau liberally cribbed his film from Bram Stoker's popular novel *Dracula*—without asking permission. The widow Stoker cried "foul" and slapped the production with a lawsuit. Before the film ever left Europe, all prints were ordered destroyed. Somehow, several copies survived the slaughter, and film history is one hell of a lot richer for it.

The innovative—almost surreal—European "feel" for horror is also on display in Danish director Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*. The film is definitely an acquired taste; intentionally tedious at times, it's altogether too muted to be outright scary. Dreyer's film is the first of many adaptations of Sheridan La Fanu's story "Carmilla" but, for all its painstaking attempts to achieve an unsettling mood, there is no attempt to capture the sadness of the original story.

Dreyer insisted on shooting only at dusk and dawn, incorporating the hazy, drowsy ambience into the film's overall feel. Likewise, the actors all seem to be just waking or dozing off. It's calculated and artsy, and at one time many critics hailed the film as a horror masterpiece. "Students" of film were encouraged to study it. That doesn't seem to be fashionable anymore. While it contains many interesting elements, *Vampyr* is a film that invariably disappoints the first time you watch it.

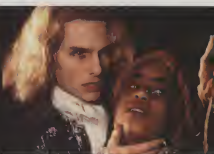


From Max Shreck as Count Orlok in 1915's *Nosferatu* (right), to Wesley Snipes in the recently lensed *Blade* (below), vampires have been haunting the big screen from cinema's earliest days.





ABOVE: Ingrid Pitts in the 1970 Hammer Film, *The Vampire Lovers*. MIDDLE: Tom Cruise as Lestat in the film version of Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire*. RIGHT: Bela Lugosi and Carol Borland in MGM's frequently dismissed 1935 film, *Mark of the Vampire*.



The "legitimate" movie version of *Dracula*, filmed in 1931 and bolstered by the myth-making presence of Bela Lugosi in the role of his lifetime, has been chronicled, scrutinized, and discussed beyond the scope of this article (for this reason, we'll make little mention of *Dracula* in this essay). The plain truth is that, without Lugosi, you got nothin'! Some of the trappings, as photographed by Karl Freund, are atmospheric and impressive, but the film as a whole is a stone bore.

Far more successful is Lugosi's "reprise" of his star-making vampire shtick in MGM's *Mark of the Vampire* (1935). The film, clocking in at barely an hour, is often casually dismissed for its "cheater" ending, but the 39 minutes of the film that precede the bogus denouement contain some of the most spine-tingling segments in any film of the decade. Not "scream-out-loud scary," but the right combination of sound and shadow to deliver the familiar tingle that lovers of old-time horror have come to relish.

Lugosi's iconic presence is minimal (he has exactly one line) but invaluable. Amid a bellicose cast of star-caliber character actors, such as Lionel Barrymore, Jean Hersholt, and Lionel Atwill, the sight of Bela stalking silently along the mansion's corridors leavens some high-blown theatrics with a good dose of old-fashioned horror. Atwill has the best line: When told that villagers believe the vampire can change himself into a bat or a wolf, he chortles, "How versatile."

Indy productions were around to cast in on the early-1930's horror hysteria, cobbling together low-budget curios such as *The Vampire Bat*. Actually more of a "mad doctor" thriller than a supernatural shocker (secret experiments are made to look like the work of a vampire), it is, once again, the cast that

brings the time-honored stew to a boil. Melvyn Douglas is the likable hero. Fay Wray, yet to be pawed by King Kong, is on hand to be saved. Dwight Frye, immortalized the previous year as *Dracula's* Renfield, is a simple-minded villager and, best of all, Lionel Atwill in another full-throttle performance as the mad medico with the vampire "m.o." Lots of shadowy shots in and around Hollywood's legendary Bronson Canyon complete the picture.

The 'forties saw the advent of producer Val Lewton's innovative batch of understated horror films, most notably *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*. Tucked into the production schedule was a minor gem called *Isle of the Dead*, about an insidious plague ravaging a handful of housemates on a windswept Greek island. The star power of Boris Karloff as a paranoid Greek general who suspects those around him of vampiric tendencies lends guts to an otherwise too-subtle scenario. The vampire element is blended smoothly into the literate script, however, and there are more than a few chilling moments to offset the sedate theatrics.

It was up to the fast-paced, low-budget production team headed by Roger Corman to put a fresh spin on the formulaic blood-sucker saga. In the heyday of drive-ins and double-bills, Corman cranked out the quickies at an alarming rate, now and then stumbling upon a nugget of innovation amid the breakneck shooting schedules. In 1957, Charles Griffith and Mark Hanna whipped up a screenplay about a vampire from outer space. In *Not of This Earth*, Mr. Johnson, in the person of Paul Birch, is the emissary of a starving civilization that lives on human blood. Settling into a suburban home, he drains his victims and ships their blood to

his home planet via the molecular transportation device in his living room.

Eventually, the pretty nurse (Beverly Garland) he's conscripted to give him his daily transfusions tumbles to the scheme and blows the whistle, dooming Birch and his planet. It plays a lot better than it sounds, in part because the production is so unpretentious. There are liberal doses of humor, and Garland is likable and energetic as always. Dominating the picture, however, is portly Paul Birch. It is his screen presence that lends the story the underlying feeling of tragedy so important to the success of any good vampire story.

The 1950s produced few *bona fide* vampire films. *The Vampire* (a non supernatural, chemically produced bloodsucker) had a decent cast and scary makeup, and *Blood of Dracula*, a teen pic about hypnotic regression, was notable for having absolutely nothing to do with *Dracula*. One low-budget masterwork did emerge, however: *The Return of Dracula*, starring Francis Lederer as the Transylvanian, played up a premise that so many vampire films tend to neglect. At the heart of the horror lies the fact that the vampire is just a regular guy. He blends! He might appear to be a pal or a beloved relative (in this case, a young girl's revered uncle, visiting from Europe—shades of Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*). His insinuation into the fabric of the girl's small-town life is the unsettling "McGuffin" that makes the picture work.

There are loads of spooky scenes, many involving the vampire's hideout in—where else?—Bronson Canyon! For lovers of 1950's ballyhoo, there's a classic "gimmick" shot: As a vampire gets staked, the black-and-white footage is doused with a spurt of garish red blood. Still, you wouldn't have much of a film without Francis Lederer. Slim, suave, and unsettling, he's one of the screen's very best Draculas. His commanding presence compounds the shame that this film is so often overlooked.

Richard Matheson's story *I Am Legend* has been filmed twice (a third production, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was rumored to be in the works). The original screen version, *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), can perhaps be viewed as the cinematic bridge between the cultured vampire of yore and the parasitic, leather-bound punks that populate the screen today. In this scenario, the vampires are overtly lecherous zombies, living only to feed.



No charisma, no tragedy, just thirst.

The post-apocalyptic saga stars Vincent Price as, well, the last man on Earth; the only survivor of a plague that's ravaged the entire globe, the after-effects of which cause the deceased to rise from their graves and seek human blood. Price spends his days driving stakes through the hearts of sleeping vampires. By night, the relentless hordes pound on his doors and smash his windows as he drowns out their moans with music. This depiction of vampires as unfeeling, unthinking, roving in packs, survives in part in today's horror films.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw mature horrors such as *Track of the Vampire*, *Brides of Dracula* and, most notably, *The Vampire Lovers*, which overtly exploited the vampire's underlying sexual intentions. This frank, modern spin equating blood lust with sexual lust, coupled with the depiction of vampires as part of a clandestine society, whether marauding in bands or simply networking, is the combination that contemporary vampire films exploit without subtlety.

In *The Vampire Lovers*, La Fanu's "Carmilla" is resurrected again, making no attempt to disguise the protagonist's lesbian lustings. The film made a horror film icon of actress Ingrid Pitts who continues to parlay her identification with the role today. It is one of the better Hammer Films productions, and the lesbian encounters it chronicles certainly make it unique among Gothic horror pictures—"Gothic" being the key word.

Modern interpreters of horror, looking to hook disenfranchised, Gen-X consumers, would have been nuts *not* to seize upon the burgeoning "Goth" subculture (black clothes, white skin, loud music) for inspiration. Hence the thrashing, hopped-up young hedonists who make *Blade*'s life a living hell. It makes perfect sense; take Marlon Brando's "Wild One" and give him fangs, or pierce the cheeks of *West Side Story*'s Jets. Make them all overtly carnal bloodsuckers and you've got box-office dynamite!

The Lost Boys (1986), featuring a host of up-and-coming actors such as Jason Patric, Corey

Haim, and Keifer Sutherland, presented its vampires as a pack of young high school toughs, neck biting and peer pressure figuring prominently in their supernatural arsenal. Aimed at a decidedly juvenile audience, it was the one thing a juvenile film cannot be—dull. *Interview with the Vampire*, featuring a ludicrously miscast Tom Cruise, attempted to capitalize on whatever romantic tragedy was left about the vampire legend—and failed, big time! The froufrou clothes and 19th-century bric-a-brac photographed well, but irrevocably contemporary performers

such as Cruise, Brad Pitt, and Antonio Banderas look ill at ease in every scene.

Among contemporary horror films, it is *Blade* that successfully incorporates just about all of the vampire clichés that have accumulated over the years. That doesn't make *Blade* a good movie. It just suggests that its producers took aim at an audience and nailed it. The opening sequence, a blood-drenched battle in a subterranean dance hall, sets the tone for a picture that wears its callous inurement to violence on its sleeve. Wesley Snipes as the eponymous hero is the embodiment of this tendency. In a performance that was no doubt intended to appear taciturn and world-weary, he comes across as just plain numb to the bloodletting going on around him, engendering no audience empathy whatsoever.

Significantly, the *Blade* scenario pits the old school of cultured, nobleman vampires against the rebellious new breed of neck-biting rockers. The oldsters would like to see some semblance of dignity restored to their *sub rosa* society. The punks want to smash the conventions, show nonvampire civilization their defiance and, it goes without saying, like, totally rule!

It is interesting to note that the younger bloodsuckers, as represented by actor Stephen Dorff, are presented in a way that unmistakably draws comparisons to the seamy urban drug culture. They're depicted as insatiable, sweatily longing for the next fix. Heroin chic, so to speak. There's nothing thematically wrong, I suppose, with equating the undead with society's drug-addicted outcasts. The comparison is entirely apt, in fact. But it certainly sounds a death knell for the harmless hair-raising of Bela's heyday. Where's the escapism? Where's the innocent thrill we derive from total fantasy? Aren't the inner-city hells—the shooting galleries and crack houses—among the realities moviegoers are trying to escape? ☛

Marty Baumann is the award-winning editor/designer of *The Astounding B Monster*, <http://www.bmonster.com>

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The Green Man, the Green Woman, and the Mythic Forest.

SOME YEARS AGO, SHAWNA MCCARTHY CALLED TO TELL ME SHE'D BEEN NAMED THE EDITOR of a brand-new Fantasy magazine, and she asked if I would write a regular column on folklore and fantasy fiction. I agreed, and wrote the first "Folkroots" piece, published in the October 1994 issue of *Realms of Fantasy*, inspired by the lore of the woodlands surrounding my village in Devon, England. Subsequent columns have taken us farther afield, to eastern and western Europe, to North and South America, to Africa and (with contributions by Heinz Insu Fenkl) to the lands of Asia. Today, with a new millennium upon us, I'd like to return to the "roots" of western myth anchored deep in forest soil, and to take another look at the tales that hide in the shadows of the woods.

The Green Man, consort of the Moon-Goddess, is represented by the foliate mask in this painting by Robert Gould.

I've spent a great deal of time in the woods over the past 10 years, both literally and creatively, while working on a series of faery books with artists Brian and Wendy Froud. Faeries are nature spirits, and as such can exist in open, cultivated land ... and yet, when you follow the breadcrumb trail of their stories, sooner or later

you will find yourself back in the forest. In Devon, those forests are misty, mossy, and filled with a palpable enchantment; gnarled old oaks hunch over footpaths like the sentient trees in Arthur Rackham paintings. In ancient times, the area was a stronghold for animist religions practiced in sacred groves, and for several centuries leaders of the Christian church recorded the particular difficulty of turning Devon country folk from their pagan ways. Writing faery fiction set in the woods of Devon has been a particularly challenging task, for all forests are not alike—each has its own unique spirit which must be captured upon the page. The Devonshire woods are not quite the same as those of Herefordshire, for instance, which inspired the great primeval forest in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*—nor are they the same as the haunted Breton forest of Brocéliande in Holdstock's *Merlin's Wood*; or the craggy Welsh woods of Alan Garner's *Owl Service*; or the faery-haunted pines of northern Canada in Charles de Lint's *The Wild Wood*; or the Sun-dappled groves at the labyrinthine heart of Midori Snyder's Italian tale, *The Innamorati*.

The task of a fantasist writing about magical woodland is to articulate the unique mythic voice of a specific landscape, even if that land is an imaginary one, a step away from the world we know. Tolkien's Middle Earth is imaginary, of course, yet imbued with the spirit of his beloved Oxfordshire; Lord Dunsany's elvin wood in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is steeped in that writer's native Irish lore; Patricia A. McKillip blends the forests of England (her childhood home) with the winter woods of upstate New York in her beautiful "Tam Lin" novel, *Winter Rose*; Jack Vance drew on the coastal lands of northern Europe to create the Elder Isles of *Lyonesse*. Even in old fairy tales, where description is at a minimum, the forests are firmly rooted in local soil—look at woodland tales recounted by the Brothers Grimm (Germany), George Webb Dasent (Norway), Eleanor Brockett (Turkey), Christina Opareenko (Ukraine), or Italo Calvino (Italy), and you will see that locale has flavored each story in subtle and intrinsic ways. Too many aspiring Fantasy writers, by contrast, create Generic Fantasy Forests—mere stage sets upon which dialogue is declaimed and action takes place. These are not trees that will haunt our dreams, like the vast forests of Middle Earth; they are rootless, two-dimensional—packed away



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when the scene is done.

When skillful writers plunge into the woods, they will find legends unique to the soil, weather, and vegetation of each distinct landscape—but they will also find the archetypal legends that link all forests in the western imagination. The Archetypal Forest is not the Generic Forest. Its shadows hold all the myths of the woods handed down to us since the dawn of time, echoing the fear as well as the awe with which our ancestors viewed the wilderness. The masters of fantasy literature—Morris, Eddison, Lewis, Tolkien—were well versed in myth and archetype, and they used these tools to create forests so vividly rendered, real, and *true* that readers shall continue to wander through them for many generations to come. How can writers today create magical woodlands as vivid as did these past Masters? Not by imitating Tolkien and the rest (as too many young writers try to do), but by using the same tools: myths, archetypes, and careful observation of the natural world.

The legends of Britain and western Europe form a mythic heritage we all share as citizens of an English-language country, no matter what our racial backgrounds may be—so let's take a look at some of the forest legends that dwell in the depths (as Jung would say) of our collective unconscious. When we peer into the shadows of the Archetypal Forest, a startling face stares back at us: the Green Man, masked with leaves or disgorging foliage from his mouth. The Green Man is a pre-Christian symbol found carved into the wood and stone of pagan temples and graves, medieval churches and cathedrals, and used as a Victorian architectural motif, across an area stretching from Ireland in the west to Russia in the east. Although commonly perceived as an ancient Celtic symbol, its origins and original meaning are shrouded in mystery. The name dates back only to 1939, when folklorist Lady Raglan drew a connection between the foliate faces in English churches and the Green Man (or "Jack in the Green") tales of folklore. The evocative name has been widely adopted, but the legitimacy of the connection still remains controversial, with little real evidence to settle the question one way or the other. Earliest known examples of the foliate head (as it was known prior to Lady Raglan) date back to classical Rome—yet it was not until this pagan symbol was adopted by the Christian church that the form fully developed and proliferated across Britain and the continent. No known writings exist explaining what the foliate head represented in earlier religions, or why precisely it became incorporated into Christian architecture—but most folklorists conjecture that the foliate head symbolized mythic rebirth and regeneration, and thus became linked to Christian iconography of resurrection. (The Tree of Life, a virtually universal symbol of life, death, and regeneration, was adapted to Christian symbolism in a similar manner.)



The Green Man (rendered here by Charles Vess) represents nature's cycle of life and death, while apples represent immortality and supernatural enchantment.

The Jack in the Green is a figure associated with the new growth of spring and May Day celebrations. In Hastings, England, for instance, the Jack pageant is still re-enacted each spring. The Jack in the Green is played by a man in a towering eight-foot costume of leaves, topped by a masked face and a crown made out of flowers. He travels through the town accompanied by men whose hair, skin, and clothes are all painted green, and a young girl bearing flowers, dressed and painted entirely in black. Morris and clog dancers entertain the crowds, while the Jack—a trickster figure—rumps and chases pretty girls, playing the fool. At length he reaches a mound in the woods below the local castle. The Morris dancers wield their wooden swords, striking the leaf man dead. A poem is recited over the creature solemnly, then merriment breaks out as each member of the crowd takes a leaf from the Jack for luck. (According to great mythologist James Frazer, "the killing of a tree spirit is always associated with a revival or resurrection of him in a more youthful and vigorous form.")

In Bavaria, a similar tree-spirit called the Pfingstl roams through rural towns clad in alder and hazel leaves, with a high, pointed cap covered with flowers. Two boys with swords accompany him as he knocks on the doors of random houses, asking for presents but often getting thoroughly drenched by water instead. This pageant also ends when the boys draw their wooden swords and kill the green man. In a ritual from Picardy (France), a member of the "Compagnons du Loup Vert," dressed in a green wolf skin and foliage, enters the village church carrying a

candle and garlands of flowers. He waits until the Gloria is sung, then walks to the altar and stands through the mass. At its end, the full congregation rushes up to strip the green wolf of his leaves, bearing them away for luck.

Such rituals are the debased remnants of pre-Christian rites and festivities. In these old religions, trees were held sacred; forest groves were perceived as the dwelling place of gods, goddesses, and a variety of nature spirits. Some scholars now think modern May Day revels were once part of pagan spring fertility rites (complete with pole representing the phallus) since the pageants have overtly sexual elements—and yet we can never really know for certain, for the original meanings of the ceremonies have been lost through the centuries, and the Church was quick to assign lewd connotations to all pagan practices. A staunchly animist outlook (with a strong reverence for trees and the holiness of nature) was particularly entrenched among the peoples in the far north of Europe and in the British Isles—thus these were two of the areas where the Christian priests of the Dark Ages (such as Devon's stern St. Boniface) waged war against older beliefs, cutting down sacred trees and putting whole groves of woodland to the torch. To the Norse, in the wild, wintry forests of Scandinavia, a giant ash tree called Yggdrasil was the center of the universe. Its three great roots linked Asgard (the realm of the gods), Rime-Thusar (the realm of the Frost Giants), and Nifheim (the realm of the dead) with the human world above. The Celtic tribes of Britain and Ireland assigned each type of tree magical proper-

ties, and the twigs from the tops of trees were prized by magicians, warriors, and healers. Each letter in the Celtic "ogham" alphabet stood for a tree and its magical associations, and the symbology of trees is a richly poetic presence in Celtic myths. The English poet Robert Graves, in his extraordinary book *The White Goddess*, deals at great length with order and meanings of the letters comprising this tree alphabet. He conjectures that the famous Welsh "Battle of the Trees" (a group of ancient poems preserved in the 16th-century manuscript "The Romance of Taliesin") refers to a druidic battle of words rather than a literal battle of vegetation. Ever since Graves' lengthy reconstruction of the poem, published in 1948, mythic scholars have been arguing whether Graves' scholarship is divinely inspired or completely mad (a question one could also ask about the mythic poet Taliesin himself).

Sacred trees and groves played a central part in Greco-Roman myths. The oak was the tree sacred to Zeus, whose priests heard his voice in its rustling leaves. Adonis, the god of returning seasons and new crops, was born from the trunk of a myrrh tree. Many scholars consider the god Dionysus as a forerunner of the Green Man symbol, for Dionysus was often pictured masked, covered, or crowned in vine and ivy leaves. This compelling but dangerous deity was a lord of the wilderness; he was the god of wine (made from wild grapes), ecstasy, and sexual abandon.

Dionysus was also a god of the underworld (in the guise of Okeanos), associated with death and rebirth—particularly as he was "thrice born" himself: first as the son of Persephone and Zeus (devoured as a child by Titans); second as the son of Semele of Thebes (who dies as a result of Hera's jealousy before the baby comes to term); and third, as the fetus from Semele's body born out of the thigh of Zeus. The cult of Dionysus was one of the great Mystery religions, with rites that ranged from the intellectual and contemplative to those that were drunken and orgasmic—and which may have included (according to Robert Graves) the ritual ingestion of a hallucinogenic mushroom, *panaeolus papilionaceus*, as an aid to perception of the numinous world. Various scholars have pointed out the parallels between Dionysus and the Celtic stag-man Cernunnos, consort of the Moon-Goddess and lord of the forest in Britain and Gaul, whose followers may also have used a mushroom, *psilocybe*, as part of their Mystery rites. ("Psilocybe gives a sense of universal illumination," writes Graves, "as I can attest from my own experience of it.") Cernunnos, like Dionysus, was associated with the underworld and the great cycle of death and resurrection. Carved heads representing this forest god were often placed near doorways, springs, and woodland shrines, often carved with holes in which stag antlers or foliage was placed.

The Greek goddess Artemis was also a creature of the forest, attended by beautiful tree

nymphs (dryads) and unmarried girls. Although she was a virgin in the later Greek and Roman traditions, in earlier accounts she was the Mother of all Creatures, and not virgin but free of the control of men, as were her priestesses. Artemis was revered as a great huntress, and feared for the wild side of her nature—many forest groves were sacred to her and thus could not be entered without peril. In the famous story of Actaeon, a beautiful young man out hunting with his friends stumbles into one of her groves and spies the goddess bathing in a pool. For this crime, Artemis transforms Actaeon into a stag (with full human consciousness). Unaware, his own dogs and friends hunt the young man down and tear him apart. (See Sara Maitland's story "Lady Artemis" in her collection *Angel Maker* for a brilliant modern rendition of the tale.) Despite her later incarnation as a virgin, Artemis remained the goddess of childbirth. Under the name Eileithyia, she was the goddess of release to whom pregnant women prayed during the pain and fear of difficult deliveries. In this guise, she is related to the Green Man's wild female counterpart, the Green Woman, depicted in stone carvings as a primitive female form giving birth to a spray of vegetation. (In some carvings, she holds her vulva open as the foliage emerges.) This Green Woman symbol is far less common than the Green Man, of course, being rather hard to adapt to Christian iconography or Victorian decoration—and yet quite a few Green Women appeared on Irish churches built before the 16th century, where they are known by the name Sheela-na-gig. Some of these figures are still intact, others were destroyed or buried during church renovations in the 19th century. Like the "yoni" figures of India, it is customary to lick one's finger and touch the Green Woman's vulva for luck.

The city of Rome was born of the forest, according to its mythic origin tales. Rhea Silvia (Rhea "of the forest") was the daughter of the king of Alba Longa until her uncle stole the throne. She was packed off to the Roman equivalent of a nunnery, but gave birth to twins, Romulus and Remus, after being raped by Mars, god of war. The false king ordered the twins to be drowned, but instead (in the best fairy-tale fashion) were left abandoned in the forest. A she-wolf suckled the infants; then the children were raised to manhood by a forest-herdsman. When Romulus emerged from the woods, he helped his grandfather to recover the throne of Alba Longa—and then he returned to the forest, cleared a hill, and founded the city of Rome. By Roman law, the forest at its gates belonged to no one and lay beyond civil jurisdiction. This was the realm of Silvanus, the god of sacred boundaries and wilderness. As Rome grew, the power of Silvanus dwindled—not only locally but in the all the lands where the Roman empire extended. In those times, explains Robert Pogue Harrison (in *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*), "the forests were literally everywhere: Italy, Gaul, Spain, Britain, the ancient

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Mediterranean basin as a whole. The prohibitive density of the forests once preserved the relative autonomy and diversity of the family- and city-states of antiquity. The forests were obstacles—to conquest, hegemony, homogenization. By virtue of their buffers, they enabled communities to develop indigenously; hence they served to localize the spirit of place. In their woodlands lived spirits and deities, fauns and nymphs, local to *this* place and no other. In their drive to universalize their empire, the Romans found ways to denude or traverse this latent sylvan mass ... building roads, imperial highways, institutions, a broad integrated network of 'telecommunications.'

Mass clearings of land for building and agricultural use had profound ecological implications even in antiquity, as forest after forest was demolished and the soils of once-fertile lands eroded. Our modern despair as we watch woodland disappear from the planet is not a syndrome unique to our time. As early as the fourth century BC, Plato wrote with grief (in the *Critias*) of the barren hills surrounding Athens as grove after grove fell before the plough or the ship-builder's axe.

According to Greco-Roman tradition, dryads (the nymphs who live in trees) die when their personal tree is cut down. This is also true of other tree spirits who inhabit the forests of Europe, and include the vegetation faeries of many different cultures. In some cautionary tales, the faery folk take their revenge upon humans who dare disturb their haunts. In other cases, the faery quietly pines away with a broken heart—and when she dies, the beauty and magical soul of the land dies with her. Supernatural forest spirits take many forms, ranging from the exquisite dryads of the Greeks to the ugly tree trolls of Finland and Norway. The swor skogsfru (wood wives) of Sweden are seductive and utterly beautiful ... from the front. From the back, these faery women are made of bark, and hollow as logs. In Italy, the silvane (wood women) mate with silvani (wood men) to produce the folleti, the enchanting faeries of the land. In England, many earthy brownies and piskies make their homes in oak tree roots, and each kind of tree has its own faery to tend it and enable its growth. Men made of bark seduce young maids in the fairy tales of eastern Europe—some of whom are dangerous, while others make tender lovers. (See Jane Yolen's haunting tale "The Tree's Wife" in her collection *The Dreamweaver*, for a modern take on this theme.) The wood spirits in the forest of Broceliande (now known as



Each tree in the Celtic tree alphabet has special properties. The holly (in this Green Man painting by Robert Gould) is a tree of magical protection, spiritual balance, and compassion.

Paimpont) in the Brittany region of France also range from the benevolent to malign. In one old tale, a lost traveler finds his way to a strange chateau in the woods. The beautiful lady of the house offers him food, drink ... and her own arms to sleep in. He gallantly refuses the latter, which breaks the faery's hold on him. The morning light reveals the chateau in ruins, empty, reclaimed by the forest. Broceliande is the woodland where Merlin the magician lies entrapped in the bowels of a tree, tricked or seduced by the faery sorceress Vivian (also known as Nimue.) Merlin is a figure intimately connected with forests in Arthurian lore, for it was during his years of madness roaming the forests of Wales, after the disastrous Battle of Arderydd, that he learned the speech of animals and honed his prophetic powers. A similar tale recounts the trials of Suibhne, an Irish hero cursed in battle, forced to flee to the woods in the shape of a bird. Like Merlin (and other shamanic figures who seek Mysteries in the wilderness), Suibhne goes mad during his long exile—but when he emerges from the trial, he has mastery over creatures of the forest. (For a gorgeous modern rendition of this tale see *Sweeney's Flight*, an edition containing Seamus Heaney's long poem based on the myth, along with photographs of the Irish countryside by Rachel Giese.)

In epic romances, heroes go into the woods to test their strength, courage, and faith. In the famous medieval tale of the Green Knight, this mysterious figure rides out of the woods and into Camelot on New Year's Eve. His clothes are green, his horse is green, his face is green, and all his bright jewels. He

carries a holly bush in one hand and an axe of green steel in the other. The Green Man issues a challenge that any knight in the court may strike off his head—but in one year's time, his opponent must come to the forest and submit to the same trial. Gawaine agrees to this terrible challenge in order to save the honor of the court. He slices off the Green Knight's head—but the creature merely picks it up and rides back to the forest, bearing his head in the crook of his arm. One year later, Gawaine seeks out the Green Knight in the Green Chapel in the woods. He survives the trial, but is humbled by the Green Man and his beautiful wife through an act of dishonesty. (I recommend the excellent translation of *Gawaine and the Green Knight* by J.R.R. Tolkien if you'd like to read the full tale.)

In the French romance *Orson and Valentine*, the Empress of Constantinople is falsely accused of adultery, thrown out of the palace, and gives birth to twins in the wildwood. One son (along with the mother) is rescued by a nobleman and raised at court, while the other son, Orson, is stolen by a she-bear and raised in the wild. The pair eventually meet, fight, then become bosom companions—all before a magical oracle informs them of their kinship. The wild twin becomes civilized, while retaining a primitive kind of strength—but when, at length, his brother dies he retires back into the forest. This epic presents another great archetypal figure: the Wodehouse or wild man, a primitive yet powerful

creature one finds in tales ranging from *Gilgamesh* (in the figure of Enkidu) to Tarzan of the Apes. "The medieval imagination was fascinated by the wild man," notes Robert Pogue Harrison, "but the latter were by no means merely imaginary in status during the Middle Ages. Such men (and women as well) would every now and then be discovered in the forest—usually insane people who had taken to the woods. If hunters happened upon a wild man they would frequently try to capture him alive and bring him back for people to marvel and wonder at." Other famous wild men of literature can be found in Chretien de Troyes' romance *Yvain*, Jacob Wasserman's *Casper Hauer* (based on the real-life incident of a wild child found in the market square of Nuremberg in 1829), and in the heart-stealing figure of Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. (For a beautifully written rendition of the wild man theme in a modern context, try Alice Hoffman's lyrical, memorable novel *Second Nature*.)

Mythic tales of forest outlaws are a sub-category of wild-man legends, although in such stories (Robin Hood, for example) the hero is generally a civilized man compelled, through an act of injustice, to seek the wild life. Magical tales of hermits and woodland mystics form another sub-category, and Christian legends are filled with tales of saints living in the wilderness on a diet of honey and acorns. This, again, is bolstered by the actual experience of people in earlier

times, when it was not uncommon for folk marginalized by the community (mystics, herbalists, or witches, widows, eccentrics, and simpletons) to live in the wilds beyond the village, by choice or necessity. A 93-year-old neighbor of mine in Devon remembers such a figure in her youth—a harmless old soul who lived in a cave and was believed to have prophetic powers.

To the German Romantics, forests held the soul of myth and thus of *volk* culture, believed to be more pure and true than the artifice of civilization. Hoffman, Tieck, Fouque, Novalis, and others entered the fairy-tale forest to create mystical, darkly magical works making deft use of mythic archetypes. In the early 19th century, the Brothers Grimm published their famous German folklore collections, full of tales in which a journey to the dark woods was the catalyst for magic and transformation. The passion for folklore spread across Europe, touching every area of the popular arts in addition to fostering a new academic climate for collection of oral tales and ballads. In Scotland, the Reverend George Macdonald, inspired by the works of the German Romantics, began to write magical stories—like "The Light Princess" and "The Golden Key"—which have since become classics of the Fantasy field. In the fairy woods of Macdonald's imagination, talking trees (both wondrous and wicked) are drawn directly from mythic

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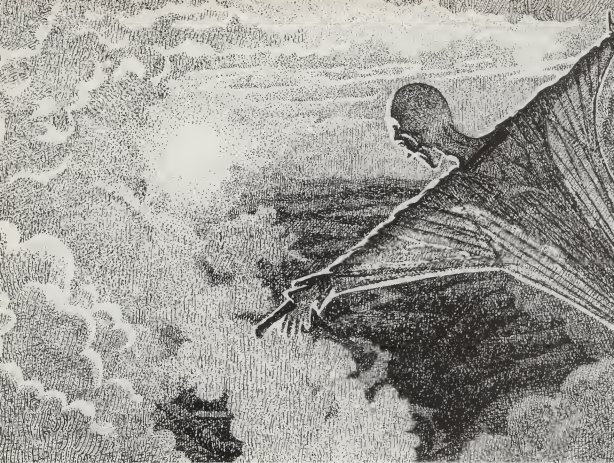


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In a distant country where the towns had improbable names, a woman looked upon the unmoving form of her newborn baby and refused to see what the midwife saw. This was her son. She had brought him forth in agony, and now he must suckle. She pressed his lips to her breast.

"But he is dead!" said the midwife.

"No," his mother lied. "I felt him suck just now." Her lie was as milk to the baby, who really was dead but who now opened his dead eyes and began to kick his dead legs. "There, do you see?" And she made the midwife call the father in to know his son.

The dead boy never did suck at his mother's breast. He sipped no water, never took food of any kind, so of course he never grew. But his father, who was handy with all things mechanical, built a rack for stretching him so that, year by year, he could be as tall as the other children.

When he had seen six winters, his parents sent him to school. Although he was as tall as the other students, the dead boy was strange to look upon. His bald head was almost the right size, but the rest of him was thin as a piece of leather and dry as a stick. He tried to make up for his ugliness with diligence, and every night he was up late practicing his letters and numbers.

His voice was like the rasping of dry leaves. Because it was so hard to hear him, the teacher made all the other students hold their breaths when he gave an answer. She called on him often, and he was always right.

Naturally the other children despised him. The bullies sometimes waited for him after school, but beating him, even with sticks, did him no harm. He wouldn't even cry out.

One windy day, the bullies stole a ball of twine from their teacher's desk, and after school, they held the dead boy on the ground with his arms out so that he took the shape of a cross. They ran a stick in through his left shirt sleeve and out through the right. They stretched his shirt tails down to his ankles, tied everything in place, fastened the ball of twine to a buttonhole, and launched him. To their delight, the dead boy made an excellent kite. It only added to their pleasure to see that, owing to the weight of his head, he flew upside down.

When they were bored with watching the dead boy fly, they let go of the string. The dead boy did not drift back to Earth, as any ordinary kite would do. He glided. He could steer a little, though he was mostly at the mercy of the winds. And he could not come down. Indeed, the wind blew him higher and higher.

The Sun set, and still the dead boy rode the wind. The Moon rose and by its glow he saw the fields and forests drifting by. He saw mountain ranges pass beneath him, and oceans and continents. At last the winds gentled, then ceased, and he glided down to the ground in a strange country. The ground was bare. The Moon and stars had vanished from the sky. The air seemed gray and shrouded. The dead boy leaned to one side and shook himself until the stick fell from his shirt. He wound up the twine that had trailed behind him and waited for the Sun to rise. Hour after long hour, there was only the same grayness. So he began to wander.

He encountered a man who looked much like himself, a bald head atop leathery limbs. "Where am I?" the dead boy asked.

The man looked at the grayness all around. "Where?" the man said. His voice, like the dead boy's, sounded like the whisper of dead leaves stirring.

A woman emerged from the grayness. Her head was bald, too, and her body dried out. "This!" she rasped, touching the dead boy's shirt. "I remember this!" She tugged on the dead boy's sleeve. "I had a thing like this!"

"Clothes?" said the dead boy.

"Clothes!" the woman cried. "That's what it is called!"



This story first appeared in the November 1988 issue of *The New York Times*.

THE DEAD BOY AT YOUR WINDOW

THIS STORY HAS WON
MORE AWARDS AND HONORS
THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A
STICK AT. READ IT AND
YOU'LL KNOW WHY.

By BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS Illustration by JANET AULISIO

More shriveled people came out of the grayness. They crowded close to see the strange dead boy who wore clothes. Now the dead boy knew where he was. "This is the land of the dead."

"Why do you have clothes?" asked the dead woman. "We came here with nothing! Why do you have clothes?"

"I have always been dead," said the dead boy, "but I spent six years among the living."

"Six years!" said one of the dead. "And you have only just now come to us?"

"Did you know my wife?" asked a dead man. "Is she still among the living?"

"Give me news of my son!"

"What about my sister?"

The dead people crowded closer.

The dead boy said, "What is your sister's name?" But the dead could not remember the names of their loved ones. They did not even remember their own names. Likewise the names of the places where they had lived, the numbers given to their years, the manners or fashions of their times, all of these they had forgotten.

"Well," said the dead boy, "in the town where I was born, there was a widow. Maybe she was your wife. I knew a boy whose mother had died, and an old woman

who might have been your sister."

"Are you going back?"

"Of course not," said another dead person. "No one ever goes back."

"I think I might," the dead boy said. He explained about his flying. "When next the wind blows..."

"The wind never blows here," said a man so newly dead that he remembered wind.

"Then you could run with my string."

"Would that work?"

"Take a message to my husband!" said a dead woman.

"Tell my wife that I miss her!" said a dead man.

"Let my sister know I haven't forgotten her!"

"Say to my lover that I love him still!"

They gave him their messages, not knowing if their loved ones were themselves long dead. Indeed, dead lovers might well be standing next to one another in the land of the dead, giving messages for each other to the dead boy. Still, he memorized them all. Then the dead put the stick back inside his shirt sleeves, tied everything in place, and unwound his string. Running as fast as their leathery legs could manage, they pulled the dead boy back into the sky, let go of the string,

and watched with their dead eyes as he glided away.

He glided a long time over the gray stillness of death until at last a puff of wind blew him higher, until a breath of wind took him higher still, until a gust of wind carried him up above the grayness to where he could see the Moon and the stars. Below he saw moonlight reflected in the ocean. In the distance rose mountain peaks. The dead boy came to earth in a little village. He knew no one here, but he went to the first house he came to and rapped on the bedroom shutters. To the woman who answered, he said, "A message from the land of the dead," and gave her one of the messages. The woman wept, and gave him a message in return.

House by house, he delivered the messages. House by house, he collected messages for the dead. In the morning, he found some boys to fly him, to give him back to the wind's mercy so he could carry these new messages back to the land of the dead.

So it has been ever since. On any night, head full of messages, he may rap upon any window to remind someone—to remind you, perhaps—of love that outlives memory, of love that needs no names. *ia*

THE WOMAN IN SCARLET

All the standard elements are here: Swords, sorcery, and sex. But we all know that no story by Tanith Lee can ever be "standard." Enjoy.

BY TANITH LEE

ILLUSTRATION BY
LUIS ROYO

It was always one way when he met them, on the long roads, high lands, low lands, rich or not, at the little villages, in the towns, too, and in the slim white cities, even there, or under the green roofs of forests, or on a seashore washed by the sea empty of most things but air and light. "Look," he noted them whisper, the men, the women, the children, the slaves. "Do you see him? He is a *Sword's Man*." Sometimes they would follow him a short distance. If not, they stared till he was out of sight. Occasionally, not that often, they might approach, more likely send a servant after him. Otherwise, the approach came from strangers still unseen, who had heard tell of him, or sensed his arrival, like a season. The men generally wanted straightforward help, rescue, or to train some rabble of an army, or teach their sons to fight. The women usually required him to murder somebody. Then again, men and women both, now and then wanted him for other things. To show him off, display him, to bed him or own him, if only for a night. He said No more times than he said Yes, to all the requests. But for the beds it was always No. They should remember, and they did, but hoped he might forget: He was wedded to his Sword. All his kind were. Married to her, and her possession, never theirs.

"COOR KRAHN, MUST YOU BE GOING?"

"I must."

"Can't I tempt you to remain a handful more days? There's the horse I spoke of ... why don't you come and see if you like it?"

"I walk where I go, Lord Juy. It keeps me fitter."

"Oh that. You're fit as three men. Stay for the dinner tonight. It's my daughter's birth-feast."

"My work's done here, Lord Juy. My thanks, but I'll be on the road by noon."

"She's restless," said the rich aristocrat, half contemptuous, and half jealous, frowning, admiring, uneasy, "is she?"

"Maybe."

"Tell me her name again."

Coor Krahn did not like to say his Sword's name to others, but also he did like to. He stayed in two minds on this. "Sas-peth," Coor Krahn said, unsmiling, his black eyes burning up, so Lord Juy slightly recoiled. "Sas-peth Satch."

"And that other name she has—no, don't say that one. I recall *that* one. And why she has it. It's a good name, Coor Krahn. And you are a mighty Sword's Man. Now, because of your skills, my lands stretch to the Black River. I'm grateful. The slave will bring your fee. It's as we agreed."

"I never doubted that," said Coor Krahn. He bowed and turned his back upon Lord Juy. (They both understood he had referred not to a lord's honor but to a Sword's Man's power and rights.)

A few minutes later a slave came, and presented the wallet of gold, crawling on his knees.

The Sun was high over the scaled towers of Juy's mansion as Coor Krahn turned on to the road out of the valley.

The wallet was stowed in the leather pack across his back. No sane man in half a world would ever dare to try to steal it. Nor any of the ornaments a Sword's Man wore, nor any piece of his armor or arms.



At Coor Krahn's side, she hung from the belt of red leather in her scarlet silk scabbard. Although young still, he had walked so long, so many years, with that feel of her beside him, that to walk without her would have seemed like lameness. And in the same way, to sleep without her lying along his body and under his hand, like death.

"Sas-peth," he murmured once, as he walked up from the glowing valley, "Sas-peth Satch." But now he smiled, to himself, or to her. He often spoke a little to her, though he never spoke very much to other men, and to women, less.

TONIGHT HE DREAMED OF HER.

In the dreams he saw her in her spirit shape, which naturally was female. But also, in dreams, she put on flesh and blood.

They were walking in a night garden, high on a roof above a city, perhaps Curhm-by-Ocean, or Is-lil in the north. Slender and dark, the sculptured trees rose from stone pots, and a stone lion, polished smooth as water, held the round orange Moon between his ears.

Coor Krahn could smell a perfume, like a spice, which in her woman shape the Sword had put on. Her hand rested lightly on his arm. Her face too was powdered pale, as the faces of aristocratic women always were. (Although in other dreams, when she strode or rode with him into battle, she was tawny as any peasant boy.) Her long hair looked smooth as the lion, as night water. She wore her color, as she always did, deep red, bordered with flame red. Her eyes were black as his own.

"Why are you up here, Lady Sas-peth?" he asked her courteously. He was unfailingly formal, when first addressing her, even when, as in some dreams they did, they lay down together.

"There is the sea," she said, pointing her narrow finger away across the houses and the temples, to a curving line of fine white fire, which described waves breaking on the city stones. This was Curhm then, yet it had a look more of Gazul, which rose by a desert.

"Do you wish to go to the sea, Sas-peth?"

"No. Away from the coast."

"Tell me then, where shall we go?"

Then she turned her narrow, perfect face and gazed at him. Her gaze was not like that of any woman he had ever met, high-born or lowly. Nor, for that matter, like the gaze of any man.

"At this time, I grow tired of our wandering about, Coor Krahn. Let us rest soon."

In the dream he was startled. But she sometimes made him start. During the first dream in which she had bared her breasts and kissed him and drawn him down, he had been amazed, so amazed that it amounted to fear, until, presently, everything was lost in her.

"Then—then, lady, we'll rest a while. Where would you wish our rest to be?"

"Some small place," she said, idly now, more womanly. She glanced away, and smiled secretively, as sometimes she did before they coupled. But she drew her hand from his arm, and the long tail of her scarlet sleeve slipped over his wrist, cool as a snake. "The next small place, perhaps."

"It will be some upland village—" he said, almost protesting.

She did not reprimand him.

Instead, she drifted off, crossing over the face of the Moon, moving away through the garden, until she vanished behind the trees.

He woke, disturbed slightly, and lay thinking of the memory of her, her shadow-silhouette against the face of the Moon.

But under his hand, she lay silent now, and steel hard, out of her scabbard.

"Whatever you wish, Sas-peth Satch. As always. I am your warrior, master of all but you. Your slave, Sas-peth."

He had slept that night under the pines and sobe trees of a little wood, and in the morning, when he walked out of the wood, he could see nothing below but the track and the sloped shoulders of the hills. At once he felt relieved, and wondered at himself. In the past, now and then, she had come to him asleep and told him they must do certain things, take a certain direction or avoid another. So far as he knew, no loss had ever resulted from his obedience. Why should it? A Sword could only bring her warrior good; fame, wealth and kudos, through lawful battle, which was the reason for his life.

He walked on, along the hills, she at his side.

Coor Krahn had been born in a poor town, whose name meant Pigs City. Undoubtedly pigs were kept there, and provided the mainstay of the town's economy. Coor Krahn grew up in a thatched house-hut, one of three belonging to the town's overseer, and overlooking five courtyards, each full, like all the town courtyards, and the town streets, of pink and gray pigs.

When Coor was nine, some Sword's Men entered the town. The overseer had himself called them, because Pigs City was experiencing conflict with a neighboring brigand across the river. (There had been trouble for months, and one night part of the town burned—Coor remembered well the cries and shrieks, the streaming metallic flames, and the odor of roast pork—that in later years he realized was not all attributable to unlucky pigs.)

Waiting on his father the overseer's table, with several other older sons, Coor was dazzled and astonished by the four warriors, the Sword's Men. They blazed in the greasy torchlight in their mail and ribbed plates of armor. These carapaces had been decorated with chasings and bosses of gold and silver so intricate they seemed embroidered there, while jewels blinked and gleamed like coals, or witch's eyes of glacial ice. The men were tanned to bronze, their hair long, braided or worn tied high, as the tails of the horses they had brought. One had a scar across his cheek that pulled his face that side always into a grin. It was a wonderful scar, and he was rightly proud of it, sometimes fondling it, and he had given it a name: The Moon's Tooth, which Coor never forgot, though afterward he forgot the

THE SWORD HAD "FLIRTED" WITH HIM, ON JUST A SHORT WAY, TO BRING

names of all four men.

Their Swords also had names, and these names Coor forgot as well, but for perhaps another reason—they daunted him so. Slanting from the belts of their men, as the warriors sat at the overseer's dinner, each Sword leaned in her scabbard of silk over leather over steel over velvet, and force swirled from them. The Swords were four queens, four enchantresses, and this was made most plain. A cup of hot wine was set before each Sword, which drink her Sword's Man never touched, also a platter with a little of the best meat, and a

flower laid on it, as if for a great lady.

Within a single day, the Sword's Men had settled the brigand across the river. His head, and that of his two lieutenants, were fixed on poles by the wooden town gate, for everyone to delight in. The heads had not even quite rotted down to the skulls when Coor ran away from Pigs City, and followed the road the Sword's Men had taken, eastward, to Curhm.

He had seen the warriors paid in silver and gold coins, all the town could spare. It was not that which made him run after them. He knew they, and their kind, maintained the fabric of law and justice across the sphere of lands too great for him, then, ever to imagine. It was not that either. Coor was strong and healthy and bored almost to a stone with pigs, and of course the men, their magnificence, had impressed everyone. Nor was it that. It was the swirl of half-seen lightning, the presence, the *essence* of the four Swords, and of one in particular. He learned after this was not quite unheard of. The Sword had "flirted" with him, as an empress might, leading him on just a short way, to bring him to awareness of his fate. She had been sheathed in jade silk. Not recollecting her outer name, he had yet some idea she was also called for something green, but that inner name her Sword's Man had never revealed. Any more than Coor, when once he had become a Sword's Man at the Sword-School of Curhm, would much reveal the inner name of Sas-peth Satch. For the inner name was given mostly at the first meeting, awake or in dream, after the man was wed to her. Only those you allowed to hire you, or were close to you in other ways, had a right to hear it. And then, generally, they—like Lord Juy—were too afraid to speak it aloud.

The Sword-School was harsh. It needed to be, to slough off quickly those who had mistaken their destiny. Some few died in their first months. Not many. Most simply failed and went home, or to other vocations. Sad, bitter even, but resigned. Only now and then one who failed killed himself. There was one of those during Coor's second year. This boy, called Fengar, threw himself from the top of the Sun Wind Temple, and died on the pavement below, an offering to the wind goddess.

Coor had known, or believed he had known, he too would rather die than fail.

But he did not fail, he did extremely well. He rose straight, like a star, as if all of him, body, mind, and spirit, had already been honing itself, unsuspected, for this work.

At first his teachers were stern with him, zealous in case he should turn out only to be a star which burned up and fell. But after five

In his 17th year, the mystery began to be taught him.

This was the mystery of the Sword, the core of the ethos of a Sword's Man. Until reckoned ready, the apprentice owned no sword of any type. The blades he fought with and learned by were common property. But now the night approached when the School would give to Coor his own individual weapon. Not a sword, but a Sword. An artifact which had been forged for him alone, occultly, hidden from all but its makers. In other hands, it was not yet female, only he would wake it to its feminine life, and to its power.

At phases of the Moon, junctures of the zodiac, the concealed artisans of Curhm-by-Ocean created a Sword for Coor, as they, or their forebears, had done, through a thousand years, for every Sword's Man of that School.

First came the ceremony that made Coor a warrior. Before it he was starved a month of food and sleep, and drawn by droughts of midnight herbs and tart, transparent smokes, into some other state, half from his body, which in turn seemed eccentric, wilder, and curiously less finite than he had ever known it. In this strange condition, he viewed eternity, the unimportance of everything else, and its contrasting utter necessity, for trivia held the seeds of different, higher matters, to be discovered only after death.

Thirty-one endless days and limitless nights Coor lived in this mode. On the evening of the 32nd day, as stars dewed the twilight over Curhm, they led him to his wedding.

A Sword's Man stayed celibate. That is, he was faithful only to his Sword. Although female, it was his phallus. Yet it—*she*—and only she—might make love to him. And she only might he ever take. She would lie at his side, in his arms, every night. And in dreams, if by his courage and his genius in combat he made her care for him, then she would give him pleasures no human woman ever could.

Coor, now named Coor Krahn, stood naked in the unlit dark of that huge granite chamber, and when they brought her to him, his steel mistress, without a scabbard, naked too, his sex rose hard, and he shook as if meeting at last his one true love.

He made his vows. In the luminous darkness, he thought he heard the Sword faintly singing at each resonance of his voice.

Then as he gazed at her, a hooded man was there, and as always he did, with exaggerated gentleness, lifting Coor Krahn's left forearm, made a long thin cut in it with a virgin razor.

The blood ran out and dripped away and away, ruby beads, and finally they brought her his Sword, to drink his blood, and as she drank, he kissed her, her silken skin of steel, for the first time.

When he did so, his erection faded and sank down. But he was appeased, as if he had reached a climax, and that energy was spent. While from the lessening of his flesh, vast vitality seemed to burst back through him. And in that moment, he knew the Sword's inner name.

AS AN EMPRESS MIGHT, LEADING HIM HIM TO AWARENESS OF HIS FATE.

years at the School, they were stern in another way, harsher if anything, to hammer him flawless.

From a yokel of the low lands, just able to scratch his name, he became educated and fined. He learned not only the arts of the warrior, but some of the knack of a scholar, able to read and to write, and of a courtier, who can speak and behave gracefully, unless provoked. No Sword's Man ever had a wish to insult through ignorance, for any unwise enough to anger him he would be able to destroy. But these were material things.

After the marriage, they took him to a couch, where he was to lie down and hold her, and sleep, and have the beginning dream.

The wine was drugged, and he slept instantly.

He found himself on a mountaintop, among the white, cold snow, under a sky glittering light, without color. But the Sword stood before him, and she was a woman, and clothed in red, and so he knew he had been right in the name. Touching his body lightly with pearl fingers just above the heart, the Sword spoke to him in her woman's voice, while her beauty scorched him like the fiery sky.

"I am to be called Sas-peth Satch. Say my name."

"Sas-peth ... Sas-peth Satch, my lady."

"My inner name you may also speak, since I informed you at our kiss, and you heard me."

Then he said that name, and she nodded, and the dream was gone. After this he slept for a hundred hours.

Waking he remembered as they always did, and both the names. Sas-peth Satch was The Woman In Scarlet.

When it appeared, five days after she told him of it in the garden dream, the "small place" turned out to be attractive enough. The hill itself was terraced for agriculture, and brilliant as if carved from emerald. There were fields, and yards of vines. A river, crystalline and thin in spots as a rope, threaded all through, and willow willows hung over it, and then an orchard of ash-plums, and hyacinth trees.

The town was prosperous. Having reached the wide main street, which had been paved, he looked through to a second hill, and there was a lord's mansion on it, with dragon-tinted roofs. Had the Sword brought him here for war? It seemed unlikely. Even the people on the street (who stared after him in the usual way) looked otherwise carefree.

Coor Krahn went to the inn. The slave by the door was well fed and went down on his knees, smiling, to welcome a guest.

The inn master saw to the care of a Sword's Man personally. It was his pert wife, eyeing Coor Krahn in a fashion he knew quite well, who said to him, "And why can you be here, a great Sword's Man, in our peaceful little pond?"

"I'm on my way somewhere," he answered. When she tried to improve on this, he did not reply, and sat as if thinking, until she left him alone.

The day passed with sunlight and the mooing of cows in the water-meadows. As evening stole through, Coor Krahn heard the inn filling up below, and kept to his chamber. They would be discussing him sufficiently as it was.

Lanterns lit in the courtyard. Moths danced. Cool breezes blew the veils of night, and a firefly winked on and off by the well.

He was restless. He did not know why he was here. Did she mean him to stay here for sure; as she had said to rest here, and as the inn slut had said, in this peaceful little pond? He was young, not yet 30. Sufficient time for restless dawdling in a decade or so.

"Why have you sent me here, Sas-peth?" he asked her softly, as

not a warrior. He was the overseer, since his father and the other sons were all dead. He was sitting in a courtyard, with pigs everywhere, seeing to a judgment of some errant wife. She looked, of course, exactly like the pert wife of the inn master, who had tried to interest him earlier.

When he woke, dawn was ahead of him, the sky beyond the window like a peach. He caressed the steel skin under his hand, his wedded wife, the Sword.

"Perhaps, lady, I need some sign from you. Pardon my asking it of you. But I'm foxed. I don't understand. Perhaps give me some sign today, why it is you truly want to remain in this small place. Have I mistaken it? Was it some other town you had in mind? Guide me, Sas-peth Satch. Or maybe I'll have to go on anyway, a little distance, to make sure I didn't mistake your meaning."

When he said this, a shudder went over him. The dawn was cold, despite its flush, and he had thrown off the blanket. But it was not because of that. He felt his words had been dismissive, a threat that he would have his own way in spite of what the Sword wished. And that could never, *must* never be.

"Whatever you want, lady," he said.

As he got up, his limbs seemed stiff. For a second he caught sight of the ghost of some man's old age. But Coor Krahn was young, and in a moment was as he had been. He put himself, his character, on again, like his clothes.

But buckling on the belt of the Sword, for the first time in his life, it slipped through his fingers. He caught the scabbard before it met the ground. The Sword had not been in the scabbard, or the omen would have perturbed him more.

AT NOON, AN ELABORATELY DRESSED SERVANT WAS WAITING FOR him downstairs.

"From my master, I bring you greetings, Sword's Man. And this modest trinket."

Coor Krahn accepted the modest trinket—a broad silver arm-band set with several clear gems—such tokens were frequent enough. He thought, Now I shall discover why I was brought here. He said, "What's the name of your master?"

"The Lord Tyo Lionay."

Coor nodded graciously. Of course, he had never heard of him.

LORD TYO'S HOUSE WAS VERY FAIR, NOT LARGE, BUT EXQUISITE IN ALL apparent detail. Beyond, elaborate gardens ran down the hill, and next there was Lord Tyo's game park, full of spotted antelope, blond foxes, and rare tigers whose eyes were blue.

The aristocrat met Coor Krahn in a marble yard. It had a marble cistern of water, where great gold and black carp swam, or put up

"SHE IS ONLY DRAWN OUT FOR ME,
KILL. IF ANOTHER MAN SEES HER,

she went up and down with him across the room. "Why must I loiter? Do you aspire to loiter—to rest—you? Or were you only playing a game with me?"

He thought, if he slept, he might dream of her and then she would tell him why, or what she really wanted. Or even that she had been testing him, his loyalty to her that she had never, in any case, doubted. And that tomorrow they would go on, away from here.

But when he fell asleep it was late. The youthful Moon had sailed over, and the town was silent as a grave. And he only dreamed, incredibly, as he seldom did, that he was once more living in Pigs City. The change was, in this dream, he was a man full grown, yet

bold heads to look at them—at which Tyo laughed, and fed them dainties, and stroked them, too. A nightingale sang by day, in a mulberry tree of purple fruit.

"How may I assist you, Lord Tyo?"

Tyo only smiled, and the servant refilled their cups.

"I need nothing, Sword's Man. I have no enemies. Nor any wars. I possess already almost everything I want."

Coor did not frown, though he suspected now duplicity. Tyo was handsome, perhaps a year or so younger than himself. Tyo's manner was frank and charming.

"Then, my lord, you're too generous. If you require no service

from me, I'm uneasy at accepting your gift."

"Please keep the armlet. I collect such things—it's my pleasure to gift them. Your service to me you perform in allowing me to meet with you. I'd heard much of you, Coor Krahn, your valor and ability."

"You're again too generous, Lord Tyo."

"Then permit my excess. Dine with me—stay in this house, and lie soft for once. There are many diversions here. I also collect curious creatures ... and there are lovely women, if you incline to them."

Coor Krahn did frown. He said, "I am a Sword's Man. When you heard of me, had you never heard that?"

"And married to the blade? Naturally. But surely that isn't always so ..."

Coor Krahn felt a low dull anger. (In his mind he remembered the falling empty scabbard.) Did this lordling dare insult him? "With myself, Lord Tyo, always it is so."

"Forgive me ignorance, then. I'm sorry to have offended you, my noble guest. But, stay and dine."

"I'm bound elsewhere."

As Coor said this, the Sword lay heavy at his thigh. He was very conscious of her. No, he was not bound elsewhere, for she had bound him here. But why—for *this*? To bear with this rich fool and his rich fool's whims?

"Must you hurry on your road? Is it an urgent mission?"

Now Coor did not answer, scorning a lie.

And his silence, Lord Tyo Lionay took, it seemed willfully, for agreement.

He dreamed of the Sword that night, when he slept on the silken bed, at Tyo's mansion. A girl had come to bathe him, a lovely girl indeed, with skin like cream and hair like night rain. But he sent her out. After this, and the heavy food and wine, sleep and the dream came swiftly.

Sas-peth Satch lay by him on the bed in Tyo's house. She was naked as a moon, and at once put her hands upon him, watching him as his excitement mounted, playing his body like her instrument until orgasm released him with its death.

"You see that I reward you," said Sas-peth then.

"Yes, my lady. I'm rewarded beyond all treasures."

"Then you will cease your argument with me."

"I'd never argue against you, Sas-peth."

"But you have."

"How have I?"

isn't made for much of such a life. Perhaps with me—not even for a single day. To lie soft, and eat and drink over and again, and talk and talk—to tell stories of his acts that sound like boasting, to listen constantly to some lord's worthless chat—he jabbars like some farm girl—"

Between one word and the next, she was gone. Like the firefly by the well, her glow winked out, and he lay alone in the dream, and waking, under his hand her steel was that of an icicle, so his palm seemed stuck to her and scalded by her coldness.

"How have I angered you, Sas-peth, Sas-peth Satch?"

He knew. He had resisted. She was his empress; he must obey.

Coor Krahn turned over sullenly to his left side, letting go of her as sometimes—rarely—had happened in sleep. He lay with his back to her, and in the marble court below the nightingale sang on, like a clockwork engine, itching inside his brain.

"MAY I SEE IT?—PARDON MY CLUMSINESS—MAY I SEE HER? I MEAN, the Sword?"

It was the second day here. Coor looked at Lord Tyo, who stood there, mannerly, groomed and good looking, ingenuous perhaps, or merely stupid.

"A warrior doesn't give over his Sword to any man but his brothers, his master, or his smith."

"I meant, evidently, that you should hold her, but perhaps I might look. Her power's very glamorous. It attracts me."

"Let me enlighten you, my lord. What you ask is like wanting a squint at my prick." Coor Krahn had intended uncouthness. But Tyo only put back his head and laughed. Coor Krahn said ironically, "She is only drawn out for me, in privacy. Unless I draw her to kill. If another man sees her, as you ask to do, she must taste his blood."

Tyo gazed straight in his eyes. Tyo's eyes were steady and pure.

"If that's the price, I would pay it. I take it you mean a sip, not my life's blood. I've heard of this custom, I believe. Yes, why not?"

The provision of the blood—a sip, as the wretch had said—had been made of necessity. There could come certain occasions when, as Coor had mooted, a Sword must be drawn outside the need of war. For repair, or before a peer. Then the Sword's Man himself did not give her his own blood. Some fitting other was selected, by the warrior, his School or the smith, one who reckoned himself honored to be used, and would wear the scar of her bite with colossal pride.

"Again, I've offended you, my dear," said Tyo familiarly, and Coor wished to slap him like some silly slattern fumbling him at an inn.

"You make light of what is profound," said Coor Krahn.

"Not I. I'm caught in the web of her fascination. Soon you'll be gone. I must take up again my restricted life. Do you really grudge

IN PRIVACY. UNLESS I DRAW HER TO SHE MUST TASTE HIS BLOOD."

"You resist my will that you remain here."

"Ah, lady," he sighed. "Here?"

"Here."

"In this house?"

She said nothing.

"If you demand it, I shall. But won't you tell me—?"

She rose, and stood, garbed suddenly again, in the facile way of dreams (and magic) in her scarlet garments. She turned her face aside from him. For a second she seemed to him nearly evasive. "Do you question me still?"

"Not your right to command me, lady, only the reason. A warrior

me this? Oh then, I'll say no more."

A board game was brought. They ate ash-plums, and played it, as if it mattered.

IN COOR KRAHN A FURY WAS RISING LIKE A STORM. IT BEGAN IN HIM on the second day at the mansion, by which time anyway he was already sick of the place and everything it held. The decorative food curdled in his belly; the nightingale hurt in his ears. The tamed beasts that strolled about the marble corridors, and lay sunning themselves in Tyo's park—where his lordship did not even hunt them—seemed to be other versions of Coor Krahn, also trapped and tamed, his teeth

SPARKS FLEW UP INSIDE HIS ARM, SCABBARD WITH A NOISE

grown sticky from candies. Ten days and nights went like this. All alike. Music was played then, girls rippled in lascivious dances, board games were set for table-wars, intellectual verses read out. The lord and Coor rode and dined, and talked, and *talked*, and separated only to sleep. Tyo was affectionate and nearly deferential, so that Coor came to believe this lord found him most amusing. Not one dream came to Coor, not one dream of her, to tell him what he should do. Except, alone with her one night, he said, "Let me go from here, my lady. Or I must go from here—without your letting me." And in the dark spaces of sleep after this, he thought he caught a glimpse of her, faint as a candle flame, miles ahead and carried away from him. And he followed in vain.

PERHAPS THE 11TH NIGHT ARRIVED, OR THE 12TH; 12—THE NUMBER it was sometimes believed was unlucky. He had that day ridden all over the park (as if searching for escape) and the tigers had watched with lolling tongues. In sleep he saw Sas-peth walking under the Sun with a tiger, which had red eyes, not blue. And he followed, but now not in vain, although he did not instantly catch up to her.

If it was the fool's park they were in he was not sure. But it was a park, cultivated, the trees grown for effect, pruned to ardent shapes that obscured no possible vista.

He came on Sas-peth Satch again suddenly. She waited under a cedar, and the tiger was gone. She looked away and away, and when Coor spoke to her, she did not reply, or turn to him. And then he realized that another was there with her, someone that he, Coor Krahn, could not see, so that at first he took the vague figure only for a shadow—although Sas-peth, in dreams, cast no shadow at all.

"Here I am," she said, "do you see?" But not to Coor Krahn.

The shadow-figure became a little less vague. It held out its arm, and Sas-peth put her hand on this arm.

Who is this that she touches?

Then there was nothing there, and she looked back at Coor Krahn, and her face was expressionless as she said to him, "I have not called you to me, Coor Krahn. What do you want? Must I forbid you, like a child, to follow me at such times?"

She had been communing with some spirit of her own kind, he reasoned. He felt shamed, and begged her forgiveness. But she merely looked away once more, and then he woke, and the fury stirred blindly inside him, like thunder under a hill.

Still, time passed. It hurt him, each wasted hour an injury. But why was the hurt so much? It was a pleasing place, this small place. No, it was a hell for him. Sleeping or waking, here he was, with this pampered lord fool, like the lord fool's slave. And the fool wanted a look at the naked Sword, and would pay in fool's blood—

They were in the marble courtyard when the fury burst, staining the air, and the aura of Coor Krahn's soul, with a black shot by fire.

But Lord Tyo did not seem to notice. Urbanely he toyed with an ivory gamepiece, smiling on.

"Then, my lord, if you say no more, I say as you did, *why not?*"

Stunned, bewildered, Tyo blinked at him.

And Coor Krahn put his right hand over on to the hilt of his Sword.

When he touched her she was like some electric thing. Sparks flew

up inside his arm, but he wrenched her from the scabbard with a noise like a rusty scream, and in the air she blazed and rang, slicing the light of day like gauze. The whole landscape seemed to gasp and petrify in awe. The Sun, wounded, trickled sparkling on her blade's edge. And Tyo stared up at her, where the Sword's Man had lifted her high into the sky. Tyo was white, he was trembling. He said softly, "So beautiful she is. Better than any jewel. Better than anything, even a woman dressed in lilies."

"Yes, so she is. Better than anything." The rage now had remade Coor Krahn. He was remote and in control of himself. It was like a battle-anger, and yet, not quite. "She's thirsty, too. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"So brief a word. Only one? I thought you'd talk more. Bear your arm for her, then."

Tyo rent his sleeve. Expensive sequins spun off like tears, or like the blood to come.

Coor Krahn slit the aristocrat's skin with great delicacy, being careful not to cut too deep, as he longed to do, careful not to sheer off his foul and hated head.

Tyo made no sound. The blood welled up, and Sas-peth Satch drew herself along, by means of Coor Krahn's grip, all the flat of her shining blade, until she was scarlet from hilt to tip.

And in that moment, as once before, long ago, Coor Krahn knew her secret.

He snatched her off, and in that same movement, she dropped from his hand, his fingers nerveless. She fell away from him. She fell at the feet of Tyo Lionay.

Tyo whispered, "What—what is it? Pick her up, man. She's not some stick—she's a Sword."

"Pick her up? No, let her lie there."

"What—what are you thinking of, Sword's Man? Have you gone mad?"

"Yes. It could drive me there."

"Take her up."

"You take her." Tyo gaped at him, his color oddly coming back from shock, though he swayed like an uprooted tree. "You take her, Tyo Lionay. It's your choice."

"This is madness."

"I told you, perhaps it is. But now I see. Why she sent me here. She smelled you, like the fruit trees. I should have seen through her, she showed me often enough, in her own woman's way."

"Coor Krahn—"

"Don't speak my name to me, you thing of shit. Take her and keep her. Here's the scabbard too." It went down by her, on the marble, with a crack. "Keep her with your other collected stuffs. Take her to bed at night. See what you dream."

And turning, he left Lord Tyo, still somehow standing, among the scattered Sun on gold and red, and above the faithless Sword that had named herself The Woman In Scarlet, since she must always be sheathed in blood.

ONLY WHEN HE REACHED THE CITY OF GAZUL DID HE STOP FOR AS long as a day and a couple of nights. And then he left Gazul and went on, into the desert beyond.

Events had happened before that, during three months of travelling. He had been called for by a pair of lords, to fight for them. He said No. But then a peasant village had entreated him to rid them of a local tyrant, showing him the bodies of four young men whipped to death. So there Coor had paused for an afternoon. He

BUT HE WRENCHED HER FROM THE LIKE A BUSTY SCREAM.

had had to ask them for a sword. It was a rough old thing, some tarnished heirloom of the village overseer's, but it did his work well enough. He saw then, with a deep bitterness, that it was his own skill in combat, as much as any weapon, which gained results. Afterward, they begged him to keep the sword. They said they would be vainglorious, telling others they had given the sword to a Sword's Man whose own blade was currently under repair. (They were so restricted in their knowledge, they had not faltered at his lack of his Sword, and concocted this explanation from spontaneous ingenuity.)

He accepted the old sword, and refused other payment. He left the slain tyrant for them to tear in ritual pieces and bury in 20 different unmarked graves. (The man had been a monster.) Inasmuch as he could feel anything, save his bitterness and insane agony, Coor was not sorry to have helped the village.

The ugly old sword was quite good, quite reliable. At another place, after another fight, he had it new-surfaced and strengthened, and made a little heavier, to suit him. Here at the smith's, no one offered comment. Only the smith's boy asked anxiously if he should go and find a worthy man, so the drawn sword could taste blood. Coor Krahn did not answer. It was the smith who shut the boy's mouth with a glare. Even fancied up, it was sufficiently obvious this sword was not any sort of Sword.

Coor Krahn did not speculate on how others regarded the facts. Probably they invented halfway logical tales, as the village had. The Sword's Man's true Sword was being mended or specially garished. Instead of impatiently awaiting her, he had journeyed on, and would then go back to collect her. Or maybe some of them realized he had lost his Sword, supposed she was broken, or taken from him, perhaps even dishonorably. But where they required his talents, and he gave them, no one expressed an opinion.

He slept under trees, under hills, in caves, at the wayside. He would not go in to sleep in any house, hovel, or palace.

There was, in the third month, a woman in a town a few miles from Gazul. She was a paid girl of the streets, but clean and pretty and young. When she spoke to him he went with her through the back alleys to her tiny dwelling. He had lain with only one, and that in dreams. This girl was limber and cunning, and scented with jasmine, but although he could rise up and enter her gate, though he could ride her well enough that she sobbed and melted like warm honey, there was no resolution for him. He could not reach it. And at last he pretended, as she herself might normally have done.

She would not presently accept payment, not, she said, because he was a warrior, but because of the pleasure he had given her. She vowed too, on a mighty god, she would tell no one he had lain down with her. "Tell any you like," he said. "Tell them, Coor Krahn had you." And then she shrank from his face.

There were never any dreams save the dreams any man might have, save once. Then he did dream, he thought, that far off he saw her—saw *her*—Sas-peth. She was standing up in water, like the sea, the waves shattering round her in white mirrors. But she was a woman open to her hips, and from there she was only a Sword, her female center locked in steel, impenetrable. And her face was averted from him, and anyway at a distance.

Gazul was closing the gates when he reached them. It was night, but a city night, thick-starred with lit windows and gaudy paper lanterns. He stayed that night, and the following day and night. He entered nowhere, not even an inn. He wandered the streets, the

marketplace, and was stared at, and he heard the mutter: *Look! A Sword's Man.* But then he heard them saying, *But whose sword is that? Never his. That old battered black cleaver. What can that be about? Of course this was a city. They were sophisticated and had no manners.*

Next morning, when the gates were opened, he walked away. *Look! Look! He thought he heard them cheaping. There he goes into the waste land. What is he at? Why? Why?*

Oh, I could tell you, he thought.

And then, when he looked back, and Gazul was only a smudge on Sun on the horizon, and the barren Earth, powdered with dust, unrolled before him like existence, he wept. The tears were hard as bits of marble to shed. They tore his eyes and lay salty on his face like blood.

He sat under a lean, crippled tree and crumbled the dry dirt in his fingers.

Coor Krahn recalled the first Sword he ever saw, the Sword in the jade scabbard, when he was nine, at Pigs City. He had learned then that such a blade was always capable of seducing another man or boy, of leading him on. But she did not then give herself to him. She stayed faithful to her husband. Only his Sword, only Sas-peth Satch, The Woman In Scarlet, had betrayed her bonded warrior.

He thought he might as well sit there, in the dust, under the tree, until he died. He drew the black sword, which was sexless, not even male, and laid it down. Coor told the sword he was sorry, and thanked it for its service. He would bury the sword, it deserved that much. But first Coor Krahn would use it to cut his veins.

However, he had not slept for two nights and two days. He fell asleep before he could pick up the black sword again.

She came to him, in the night.



he desert, in the dream, was gilded by faint fires. A round Moon of red amber was nailed in the sky above.

Sas-peth had been brought here apparently in a roofed litter, tasseled and draped with silk, by slaves, and these all waited for her some way off. She wore her scarlet, and many jewels. Her hair was elaborately dressed.

"Coor Krahn," she said, "say my name to me."

He looked at her. He paused, and then said, "Your name is *The Bitch*."

Her face did not alter. He had never seen her angry, only stern for battle. While during love, she had been amorous, sly, coaxing. Never passionate, or tender.

"Why are you here?" he said.

"What do you believe the reason might be?"

"To show me he adorns you with silk and jewelry. Does he wear you to war, too, that little boy, Tyo?"

"There are no wars in Tyo's place."

"Rest there, then. Rest and rust."

"Shall I come back to you?" she asked, surprising him, jolting his heart to the core. "What would you do?"

"How can you come back, unless I go and fetch you, Sas-peth? Do you want me to fetch you? Want, then."

"You will do without me? How?"

He said nothing.

Continued on page 71

GIFT OF THE WINTER

The message received is not always the same as the message sent. Sometimes this can make a

On a clear fall day 50 winters ago, Brother Xavier came to bring the Truth to the Children of the Winter King. Luya and I saw him first; we were by the riverbank, slicing apples to dry them for the winter when he stepped out of the brush, blinking like a mouse in the sunlight. Brother Xavier was a little man, with brown woven robes that covered him from his neck to his feet. Luya was laughing, with her back to him—then she tossed her hair, and as she looked over her shoulder, their eyes met.

My first impulse when I saw him was to run. I jumped to my feet, but Luya grabbed my wrist. "Let me go," I said. "Luya! Let me—"

"Shut it, Madri," Luya said. She stared at him with fascination. He seemed even smaller with Luya standing up; she was taller than he was. "Who are you?" she said.

"My name is Xavier."

"Let me go," I said again.

Luya shook my arm roughly, but didn't release it. "What is your clan?" she asked Xavier.

"I have no clan," he said. "I am God's monk, from the Ericines. The Order of Saint Eric."

Xavier spoke the trade tongue, but I didn't recognize half the words he used.

"Are you a trader?" Luya asked him.

"I have not come to trade," Xavier said. "I have come to give."

I looked at his meager belongings skeptically. What was he going to give us, his sandals? Luya's lips pulled into a sneer. "What have you brought

[on us] then, Olander?" she asked.
"God's secrets," Xavier said.

Luya, a dark-haired woman, her knife, sheathed on her arm, and I stepped out in fear. "Who are you, Merik," I said.

Luya was laughing to me. "Go back to where you came from, Olander." She said to Xavier, unsheathing her knife. "We don't need what you've come to give us."

Xavier paled and closed his eyes briefly. "Is this how you treat all your visitors?" he asked.

"Hey, Luya," Merik shouted from upriver.

"Merik!" I called. "We have a visitor!"

Luya swung her head around to glare at me, but sheathed her knife and turned toward our father as he joined us. "Luya threatened him," I said, not caring that I was tale-bearing. Luya always acted as though she were clan leader, even though we were only 13, not even adults yet.

"We don't threaten traders," Merik said, half to Luya, half to Xavier, as if to reassure him.

"He's no trader," Luya said. She hunched her shoulders, annoyed at me and Merik both. "He said so himself."

R KING

Huge difference in the final Word.

By Naomi Kritzer

Illustration by John Monteleone



Merik looked Xavier up and down. "If you aren't a trader, why have you come?" he asked Xavier.

"I've come to bring you to God," Xavier said. "To the Father and His only Son Jesus Christ."

We regarded him uncertainly, except for Luya, who hated him already. Xavier looked around at all the faces, including mine, and gave me a tentative smile. His sky-blue eyes were desperately earnest, and he wasn't as old as I'd thought at first, maybe 30. I stared back at him stupidly and felt my cheeks and forehead growing hot. I was shy enough around boys I knew; a strange man smiling at me was much worse. Xavier saw my shyness and hesitated, biting his lip. Then he started over. "I've come to share stories."

"We have our own stories," Luya said.

"What would you know about his stories?" I whispered.

Merik still seemed undecided.

"I am here on God's command," Xavier said, and I could hear the weariness in his voice. "I have traveled for months, for thousands of miles, because of God's Word. I don't want to be here. I'd leave now if I could."

Merik continued to study Xavier, and I knew he was thinking how small Xavier was, how weak, how foolish—and thus how great the power must be that had brought him here. Finally, Merik clasped Xavier's shoulder. "It may be that you were meant to come here and tell us your stories," he said. His voice was gentle, as if he were humoring a child. "You may stay as our guest until the Equinox," Merik glared at Luya. "You will be treated courteously."

Luya stepped forward. "Let me welcome you, then," she said. She smiled at him; it was not a kind smile. "I'll find you somewhere to sleep." She took his arm, slipping her fingers up his sleeve, under the rough, brown wool of his robe. I heard a slight gasp from Xavier, and his eyes widened with alarm, but he didn't dare pull away from her.

My clan, the Shong, lived in caves along the cliffs of the river. Xavier picked his way nervously along the path up to the caves. Luya glanced at him twice, with a look of scorn for his clumsiness, but he smiled back at her eagerly, wanting to be liked. She led Xavier to our cave and found him a place to sleep right by my bed. In the dimness of the cave Luya couldn't see my embarrassment, but she knew I was blushing even if she couldn't see my face. "Madri, why don't you show him around?" she asked, and I wondered if the taunt in her voice was as clear to him as it was to me.

Alone with Xavier, I took a half-burned stick from the fire and traced out a spot on the stone floor, near the cave mouth. "This is yours," I said to Xavier, pointing at the space I'd drawn. I took some furs and blankets from the other beds and heaped them into a bed for Xavier. When I was done, I drew another line to show Xavier where he shouldn't go.

"You can't step over that line," I said. "You're an Outsider—it would profane our house."

Xavier averted his eyes. "All right," he said.

I felt apologetic, even though it wasn't my fault. "I can't step over that line—" I said, and pointed to the back of the cave, where a chalice of melted snow would rest until winter. Xavier looked, and I realized that of course he didn't know what I was pointing at, but I went on anyway. "Until first Winter's night, I am not truly a Child of the Winter King, but only a child of the clan. There are places I can't go either."

Luya poked her head in the cave. "Are you two staying in there

for the rest of the afternoon?" she said. "There's light left yet, and work to be done."

Xavier set down his little bundle on the furs I'd piled for him. "I'll help," he said.

He followed me back down to the riverbank. The rest of the clan had heard about the stranger now. Everyone had brought their work down to the foot of the cliff, vying for a look at the stranger while pretending to be too busy to be interested. Xavier ducked his head shyly, but I could see him stealing looks at us.

Luya waved Xavier to a seat next to her on the riverbank, and a dozen of the other women and girls joined us with baskets of corn and apples and unshelled beans. Luya and I started shucking the kernels off the ears of dried corn. Xavier took an ear of corn as well and mimicked us. He was clumsy and slow with the task, though he picked up speed as he worked. Luya sat close by his side.

"Where have you come from?" one of the girls asked.

"Baltimore," Xavier said.

The girl tried out the word. None of us had ever heard of the place.

"It's a long way away," Xavier said. "A long way away."

"What's your clan?" one of the women asked.

Xavier explained again that he didn't have a clan, and started trying to explain what a monk was. Eventually he recited a lineage for us, but it seemed to be made up only of men, starting with someone named Saint Eric of the Bright Age and then Saint Paul from When the Sky Fell and so on down to someone named Father Julius.

"You are the Shong clan?" he asked when he'd finished.

"Yes," Luya said, and recited her lineage. I saw Xavier give a little nod when she listed Merik as her father; he must have guessed. I wondered if he'd guessed that we were half-sisters; we didn't look much alike. "There are seven clans near the river," she said. "Shong, Shonsen, Shaycobsen, Shabaz, Oneel, Rosen, and Li. We get along with all the other clans except for the Shonsens and the Oneels." Xavier listened quietly, shucking off corn kernels into the broad flat baskets.

When Luya finished, I saw Xavier looking at me. My face grew warm and I looked down, then back up. He was still looking at me.

"So you've come to tell us stories," I said. "Are you going to tell us one now?"

Xavier's eyes crinkled a little in a smile. "Let me think," he said. "I'm not sure which one to tell you first." He reached into the folds of his robe and brought out what I thought at first was a box—then he folded it open, and I realized that it was sewn together, but like no clothing I'd ever seen.

"What is that?" I blurted out, reaching to touch it. Xavier reflexively pulled it away from my hand, then seemed to catch himself.

"It's the Bible," Xavier said, holding it out. "You can hold it if you'd like. Just be careful, I only have one."

I took it carefully into my lap. It was sewn together, but it wasn't cloth. The outermost pieces were leather, but the inside pieces were thin and brittle. There were a few pictures, like we might draw on skins, but mostly there were thousands upon thousands of tiny black marks. Everyone else peered over my shoulder, but quickly lost interest.

I looked up; Xavier was still watching me. "Do you have books here?" Xavier asked. "Writing?" I looked at him blankly. "How do you pass on knowledge, one person to the next?"

"We tell stories," I said.

"Ah," Xavier said. "No wonder you feud with the neighboring


She took his arm, slipping her fingers up his sleeve, under the rough, brown wool of his robe. I heard a slight gasp from Xavier, and his eyes widened with alarm, but he didn't dare pull away from her.

clans." For a moment, he seemed to be speaking to himself; then he shook himself. "May I have the Bible back, please? You can look at it later, but I need it to tell my story."

I gave it back. "This book lets me tell a story *exactly* as it was told the very first time," Zavier said, and flipped through to the middle. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and—" He paused. Then he sighed and put the book down. "Perhaps telling the story exactly as it was told the first time isn't the best way to tell it today."

We waited. I finished shucking the corn in my lap and reached for another armful.

"Once long ago," Zavier said, "there was a man named Jesus." Zavier told a story about a man who was also a god, who died and came back to life, who would bring us all back to life when we died. Everyone listened politely. Zavier was not a very good storyteller. I don't think he'd told this story before—several times he stopped in the middle of a sentence and said, "Oh—wait. But before that ..." Also, he didn't know how to make a story very dramatic. Mostly his god-man just wandered around and talked a lot.

When he was done, Luya stretched slowly beside me and set her corn down. The last of the afternoon light reflected off her golden skin as she arched her back. "Now I have a story," she said, and stood up. She shook her dark hair back from her face and closed her eyes for a moment, composing her thoughts. I rested my corn in my lap, waiting. Luya knew how to tell a story.

"Long ago," Luya said, "there were no clans and there were no Children of the Winter King. All the world lived together in one huge village. Then the Winter King came to separate light from dark."

We chimed in. "Separate light from dark, water from snow, strong from weak. The Winter King came to bring order."

Luya paced among us; I found myself leaning in toward her. Although she spoke to all of us, her eyes were fixed on Zavier, as if she was challenging him. Or shaming him for his own inability to hold our attention like this. "When the Winter King came, most fled from Mesota. But a handful said, 'This is my home. This will be my home always. I've seen cold winters—'"

"—and I've survived," we chimed in again.

"All around Mesota, the world was taken by the Dark Heart of Chaos. But we are the Children of the Winter King. The Winter King brings cold to make us strong. As long as the Children of the Winter King accept His rule and His gifts, we shall *always* endure." Luya sat down beside me and looked at Zavier again; behind her long lashes, her eyes glittered. "Such is His promise."

Zavier seemed to shrink a little inside himself, and he touched his book. He told us another story, this time about how the world was made, and we all listened politely. We'd rather have listened to Luya, though, even though we all knew the stories she would tell.

In that night, in the darkness of the cave, I could hear Zavier tossing in the bed I'd made for him. Like me, he was not one to fall asleep readily. I often lay awake in the night, thinking about Luya and her easy way with everyone, wishing that my stomach didn't turn over like an unsteady pot every time I had something to say. Luya was my best friend as well as my sister, but sometimes she teased me so much about my shyness that I had to stalk off so that she wouldn't see me cry.

Everyone in the Shong clan had to tell stories occasionally. Once after some of the young men from the Oneel clan had come across the river raiding, Luya had forced me to tell the story to the clan. I had stood up by the fire, painfully aware that everyone was looking at me, and my voice had sunk to an unsteady whisper. I stammered out what had happened as plainly as I could. Everyone had been kind about it, but they were obviously relieved when I sat down. Then Luya stood and told the story, and wrapped every member of the clan in her words like a cloak. I once overheard some of the clan adults saying that Luya could talk the wolf from his lair, if only wolves spoke the trade tongue.

Zavier was an even worse storyteller than I was. That was prob-

ably why he couldn't sleep.

Zavier turned over again, his blankets rustling as he scratched himself. I could smell him from where I lay; he gave off the sour smell everyone had in winter, when it was too cold to bathe. It was difficult to tell how dirty his clothes were, since they had clearly started out brown. He hadn't been very well-prepared for his trip, not given how far he said he'd come.

I dozed off after a while, but woke to hear a bump from Zavier's bed. He'd gotten up and was trying to find the cave entrance. I propped myself up on my elbows—it was nowhere near morning. What was he doing? I could see him duck out the mouth of the cave, a gray shadow in the moonlight. I waited for a few minutes, but he didn't come back. Perhaps he'd thought the better of Merik's invitation, but why would he leave in the middle of the night? I got out of bed to see where he'd gone and nearly collided with him as he ducked under the overhang to come back inside.

"People are coming," he whispered.

"What?" I said. "What people?"

"Men and horses—coming across the river."

"Raiders." "Merik!" I shouted. "Raiders!"

Zavier shrank out of the way as my father leaped out of bed and threw himself out of the cave mouth, shouting the alarm. Luya followed him, with a quick glance at me and Zavier. "What is it?" Zavier asked me. "Should we go out, too?"

"Stay here," I said. "This is for the men to handle. The men of the clan." Luya had followed to watch, but we would be safer inside.

Zavier peered out the cave mouth. "What are they doing?"

"Chasing off the raiders. Probably from the Oneel clan. They come to steal our animals and food stores, or steal wives. It was lucky that you spotted them. Why did you get up?"

Zavier hesitated. Then: "I had to relieve myself," he said, and I could almost see his flaming cheeks, even in the dark cave. "I still have to relieve myself."

I smothered a laugh. "Use this basket—cover it when you're done," I said, and handed him the winter pot. Zavier still hesitated. "I won't look at you," I said, even though it was too dark to see anything anyway. When he was done, I put the basket in its spot by the cave mouth, to be emptied in the morning. Zavier went back to his bed, though neither of us lay down. We could hear shouts outside, and splashing; no cries of pain, though, which was good.

After a while, Merik came back to the cave and lit the lamp. "They won't be back for a while," Merik said, clearly pleased. "Good work warning us, Madri."

"It wasn't me," I said, and my voice cracked as Merik's eyes narrowed with surprise. "Zavier saw them."

Merik looked at Zavier for a long, thoughtful moment. "Perhaps you were sent to us for a reason," he said. "We'll discuss this more in the morning."

ZAVIER WAS LESS OF A NOVELTY THE NEXT DAY; EVERYONE WANTED to talk about the raid. Luya made me stammer out the story for her and everyone else and then left me alone. I took a basket of beans and went a little way down the river, so at least I wouldn't have to talk to so many people at once. After a few minutes I heard an awkward footstep and turned to see Zavier.

"Thanks for raising the alarm last night," he said, sitting down beside me. "I had no idea what to do."

I flushed—of course—and looked down at my beans. Zavier scooped some of the beans in his lap and started shelling them.

"You know that book I brought," he said. "I could teach you to read it, if you'd like, Madri. I could show you what those marks mean. They're all words, you see. It's like a story, but put down so that it will always be there."

I didn't understand, exactly. Zavier finished shelling the beans in his lap, then leaned forward and brushed a patch of dirt smooth. He picked up a twig and broke it in half to make a sharp point. "Your name, 'Madri,' is written like this. M-A-D-R-I." He scratched shapes in the dust. "This shape, M, this tells me to say an 'mmm' sound. Do you understand?" He explained how to sound out my name. "There

are only 26 shapes. It's not hard to learn, really. I've taught people to read before; it's much easier than telling stories." He looked up at me. "And if you learn to write, you can tell stories without talking." Stories without talking. "All right," I said.

As evening fell, some of the young men built a bonfire on the shores of the river. Merik drew a circle in the dirt with a stick, and the adults of the clan sat down inside it, along with the small children who wouldn't leave their mothers. Those of us who were approaching adulthood—plus Zavier—sat down behind the line, outside the circle of warmth. Some of the adults sat with their backs to the fire so that they were facing Zavier. Merik gestured for him to speak.

Zavier stood up. "Someone asked me today, 'Why, if you were sent—of all your clan—to share your stories, why didn't they send a better storyteller?'"

I bet it was Luya who'd asked that.

"I didn't know how to answer," Zavier said. "I never wanted to be a missionary."

"When I took my vows, Mesota and the river clans were the last thing on my mind. I meant to study—read, translate, and pray. Baltimore is cold enough in winter for me."

"But I was sitting at my desk one freezing-cold day, translating a text into the trade tongue—when I heard a voice. God's voice. 'Go to the clans of the north, Zavier, at the edge of the snow line, to the ones who call themselves the Children of the Winter King. Find them, Zavier. Tell them my name.'"

"But I am no missionary," I said. "Surely there are thousands of brothers better qualified! Surely you can find someone better than me to do this!"

"I told myself it was my imagination—or the crack of the log in the fire—or a fever coming on. But the voice came the next day, and the next night. Again and again. Finally, in early spring, I took what I needed and headed west. When I got to the river, I followed it north. And so I came here. Although I am the least of my brothers—and no storyteller."

"Why would your god send one so weak?" someone asked. "Why would your god choose you?"

"I don't know," Zavier said, and sat down, ducking his face.

Merik stood. "Perhaps he really did hear his god speak," he said. "The tundra is warming—more traders come every year. Perhaps the Winter King's reign is ending. Perhaps this new god's rule will start soon."

Merik was only doing what any good clan leader does, proposing the unpopular side of an issue, but Luya didn't care. She stirred beside me and shouted, "No! The Winter King will rule forever!"

"Quiet, Luya," Merik said. "You will have a voice in our circle when the Winter King has accepted you as His child."

Luya rose. She might not have a voice in the circle, but she had everyone's attention. The firelight glinted from her eyes. "The Winter King has not accepted Zavier," Luya said. "Yet you repeat his nonsense in the circle as if it meant something."

"Hush, Luya," Merik said. "Or you'll be sent away where you can't make trouble."

Luya closed her mouth with a final, defiant look and sat back down.

"Luya may be only a child, but I think she's right," one of the other men said. "The Winter King has not broken his promise to us. Why should we believe this man?"

"He warned us of the raid," someone said.

"That just means he can't hold his beer," Luya muttered beside me, and I could see that Zavier heard her, because he hunched his shoulders with embarrassment.

Merik's first wife Keris—Luya's mother—rose. "I have a suggestion," she said. "We have told Zavier he may be our guest until Autumn Equinox. Perhaps we should allow him to stay until first Winter's night, then let him face the Trial with Luya and Madri and their agemates. If he survives the night, we will know that either Zavier's god is strong enough to keep him alive or that the Winter King has accepted Zavier as His own. Then we can consider again what he says."

There was a murmur of assent around the circle.

"Zavier, approach the circle," Merik said. Zavier obeyed, standing just outside the ring. "You heard the terms. Do you accept them?"

Zavier nodded. "I do," he said. I wondered if he knew what the Trial meant.

"Good," Merik said. "We'll discuss this again after first Winter's night."

"If you're still here to trouble us," Luya said, pitching her voice just loud enough for Zavier to hear.

When is first Winter's night?" Zavier asked me the next afternoon. Zavier was shelling beans; I was mending my winter boots. I hadn't mended them earlier in the year because I'd hoped I would outgrow them. No such luck. Luya, of course, got new clothes every year, she grew so fast. I turned the boots fur side out and threaded my needle.

"It's the longest night of the year," I said. "Ninety days after the Equinox." I bit the thread loose.

"What happens that night? What's the Trial?"

I looked up at him. He hadn't known. "Why didn't you ask before you agreed to do it?"

"If I'd asked, I might have been too afraid to agree to it," Zavier said. "And clearly it's the only chance I have to bring you and your people to the faith. Besides," he said, and flushed, "I didn't want to ask in front of everyone."

I set my boot aside. "The new Children of the Winter King spend the night outside. If you're still alive in the morning, that means the Winter King has accepted you." I pulled out the blue bead I wore on a leather thong around my neck. "Children of the clan wear these. Children of the Winter King wear red beads."

"And then you get to sit in the circle with the other adults?"

"You can go anywhere you want, except for the Shaman's cave, and it won't profane anything," I said. I could hear the longing in my own voice, although I was apprehensive. All of my agemates were afraid of the Trial, except for Luya. "And you can speak in meetings." Of course Luya did anyway, but once we'd passed the Trial, she'd be allowed to officially.

Behind Zavier, Luya stepped out of the woods; I wondered how long she'd been eavesdropping. "Hey," she said. She had a basket of apples on her hip; she sat down, folding her long legs up under her, and started peeling one. Zavier and I both fell silent, listening to the slipping sound of the knife in the apple. Luya raised her hand to her lips to lick off the juice, and her eyes met Zavier's over the back of her hand.

"So, Madri," Luya said. "Have you decided which of the unmarried boys you're going to want as your own?"

"No," I said, and picked up my boot and needle.

Luya gestured toward Zavier with her knife, as if he wouldn't realize how rude this was. "Maybe you could have this one."

I pushed the needle through the fur and leather, pretending not to hear her.

"I bet you could have him all to yourself, you know."

Now I looked up. Luya must have known she'd gone too far, because she looked coolly away. I hated Luya sometimes; she was certainly in no danger of having to settle for being a second wife.

Zavier's eyes flickered back and forth between the two of us. "If you're talking about marriage, Luya, I'm celibate," he said. "I don't get married, nor do I touch women."

"Men, then? Are you a Shaman?"

"No, not men either. No one."

"Horses?" Luya was trying to get a rise out of Zavier, like she'd gotten out of me, but Zavier refused to be baited.

"Not women, not men, not horses, not sheep," Zavier said. "Not chickens. Not ducks. Do I need to deny the rest of your barnyard animals, or do you get the picture?" He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye with a conspiratorial smile. Despite myself, I found myself smiling back.

Luya, however, was shocked. "The Shamans are special; they're

chosen by the Winter King, and not everyone is like that. But to choose not to have children—that's wrong. What if everyone did that? What then?"

"Jesus never had children," Xavier said. "He blesses those who deny themselves for Him."

"What if your Adam and Eve had never had children?" Luya said. "What would have happened then?"

Zavier looked perplexed. Perhaps this was the sort of answer he'd have been prepared for if his clan *had* sent him, had sent someone with a million ready answers—someone like Luya. "Maybe the Children of Jesus have different sorts of Shamans," I said. "Perhaps Zavier was chosen by his Jesus."

Zavier gave me a look of gratitude and relief. "That's right," he said. Then he thought it over and amended, "Well, it's close, anyway."

Luya opened her mouth to answer him, but then her eyes widened, looking at something beyond us, and she stood up. "We are children of the clan," she said, flicking out her own blue bead. "Don't lay a hand on us."

Zavier and I turned to see three men standing in the clearing. Oneel men—I was certain of it. One was much taller than the others, with dirty brown hair and ice-blue eyes. "He's no child," that man said, pointing at Zavier.

Luya stepped in front of Zavier, her eyes on the tall man. "This man is a guest of the Shong clan. My father has promised his protection."

"You are Luya Shong, then." The man's eyes flickered appraisingly over Luya's long legs, her face, the black hair that cascaded to her waist.

"You must be Stavan Oneel," Luya said. "I've heard of you."

I had heard the stories too, of course. Stavan Oneel was a few years older than us and already known as the best warrior of the Oneel clan.

"Leave," Luya said with a jerk of her head. "You can't touch us, and our shouts will have the village ready for you before you're halfway there."

Stavan inclined his head. "Perhaps you'd best not come here without a protector after first Winter's night, Luya Shong. Unless you wish to join the Oneel clan."

"I'll remember that," Luya said, a slight smile on her face. Stavan and the others turned and ran back the way they'd come, disappearing into the brush.

Luya watched them depart for a long, meditative moment. Then she shrieked, loudly enough to be heard in the village, "Raiders!"

The Shong men came running moments later, and Luya's mother Keris hustled the three of us back to where she could keep watch over us. Some of the Shong men formed a war band to track the Oneel raiders back through the woods. Luya watched them go with a slight shake of her head. "They won't catch them," she said.

"Why do you say that?" Zavier asked.

"Stavan Oneel is their greatest warrior," she said. "He'll be the Oneel clan leader someday. He won't be caught by any of our men." Her voice was slightly breathless. She turned back to Zavier with a look of scorn. "So you didn't know what the Trial was when you agreed to do it? That shows courage, Zavier. Or foolishness." Her tone made it clear that she thought it was the latter.

Zavier met her eyes, even though his cheeks reddened. "If God wants me to survive your Trial, He will give me whatever strength I need."

Luya stepped closer to him, so that her body touched his. He fell

back a step. "Madri left something out," she said. "The children of the clan face the Winter King *naked* on first Winter's night." She twitched Zavier's brown robe, grasping the cloth at the hip, and I saw him flinch away slightly as her hand brushed his body. "Naked we come from our mothers," Luya said, "and naked the Winter King tests our strength and our worth."

"BLLL - EEEEE - ED," I SAID. "BLESSED."

"That's right," Zavier leaned against one of the broad old trees by the riverbank, holding his book in his lap; I peered down at the words, sounding them out as he pointed.

"Are," I read. "That was a short one. T-he—"

"The," Zavier said.

"The. Mmm. Eeek. Blessed. Are. The. Meek."

"That's right."

I looked up from the book. "This is an awful lot of trouble to go to just for a story that never changes," I said. "What good is a story that tells itself, anyway?"

Zavier set aside the book and I picked up some mending. I'd done a fine job on my boots once I'd sat down and done it, and as a result my mother had given me the rest of the family's boots to mend. "First of all," Zavier said, "it gets easier with practice, just like anything else. A month or two of practice and you'll read effortlessly."

It'll be something to work on over the winter, when it's too cold to go outside much and you don't have a lot of chores."

I shrugged. I wasn't sure I believed that it would ever be effortless. After a moment, he continued.

"There are lots of reasons that writing is useful," he said. "For instance—well, this book, the Bible, it's the stories that the Children of Jesus tell to understand our faith better, the way you tell the story about the Gift of the Winter King."

"Couldn't you just tell the stories, like we do?"

"Yes, and we do," he said.

"There are plenty of Brothers in my order who are better storytellers than I am." He smiled ruefully. "But if a hundred years pass and no one tells a story, the story is lost, isn't it? Or if there's only one person who knows a story, and that person dies suddenly? But if it's written down, people can pick it up—even generations later—and the story can be told again."

There was a story, told sometimes, about how generations ago the Shaman of the Shonsen clan died before he passed his knowledge on to an apprentice. The most important stories were told often enough that everyone still knew them, but other stories—especially some of the very old ones—were lost forever. I nodded; it could be a terrible thing.

"But you could lose a book," I said. "What if you lost the book where you'd written all your stories?"

"Sometimes that happens," Zavier said. "The most important stories are copied into many books."

"Our most important stories are told to many people," I said. Then I shrugged. "But I can see that having both a storyteller and a book would be useful."

"Also," Zavier said. "Writing—well, say Merik wants to send a message to the clan-leader of the Oneels. Would that ever happen?"

"Maybe," I said. "If they stole a wife, and he wanted to ransom her, for instance."

"If there was a person in both clans who could read and write, you could send a written message."

The Shamans are special: they're chosen by the Winter King, and not everyone is like that. But to choose not to have children—that's wrong. What if everyone did that? What then?"

"Why would you do that?"

"Written messages mean that there are fewer opportunities for misunderstanding. Say Merik offered him a ransom—what sort of ransom would he offer?"

"It depends.... Say, two calves."

"Right. So, he promises two calves. Then later the clan leader says that Merik promised him *three* calves—does that ever happen?"

I thought about it. "It's not supposed to, but the Oneels do things like that a lot. That's why our clans don't get along."

"If it's all written down, Merik can show him the paper, and then nobody can claim they were cheated." He paused. "Of course, there are a hundred other ways to cheat people—give them a sick calf, say. But writing takes care of some of the most obvious."

I thought about this. "But couldn't the Oneels just write a new paper?"

"No, everybody's handwriting looks different." Zavier explained to me about writing letters and then making your sign, a mark that's unique to you.

"I see," I said. I reached for the book. "Teach me more," I said. "You're right. This would be useful."

Still, I had to admit that the main reason I liked the idea was that with writing I could tell stories without speaking. I could talk to Zavier now more easily than to anyone, even Luya. But in front of the rest of the clan—my throat closed up and my tongue felt stupid.

Even when there was a story that I wanted to tell.

THE DAYS GREW SHORTER AND COLDER. ZAVIER BECAME more and more reluctant to leave the shelter of the cave each morning, or the warmth of the fire in the evening, but on one of the afternoons before the snow came he took me out to the woods to show me how to make paper. The plant that paper came from grew wild; Zavier and I stripped the stems and ground the fibers like corn. We mixed the pulp with water and spread it to dry on a piece of cloth stretched tight. When we were done, we had a single sheet of paper. It was a lot of work. I hoped Zavier would be around in the spring to help me.

Zavier told me to keep the paper to practice my letters; Luya watched as I put it next to my bed. "You're lucky, Zavier," she said as we sat together in the firelight after dinner. "It looks like this first Winter's night will be a warm one."

"We're all lucky," I said. "It's not just Zavier who's facing the Trial this year."

"Yes, but we have nothing to fear," Luya said. "We are strong. We are the Children of the Winter King." Her eyes narrowed slightly as she looked at Zavier. "You don't look very strong to me, Zavier."

"My faith makes me strong," Zavier said, meeting Luya's eyes. He wasn't afraid of her anymore; I envied him. "Jesus gave me the strength to come here. Do you know how far I had to walk? Farther than you'll ever travel in your life, Luya. He gave me strength to come here even though I knew someone might kill me on sight. He gives me strength to face the Trial even though, you're right—I'm not as strong as you. Winters where I come from aren't as cold as they are here. But if God wants me to live, He will give me strength to make it through the night. And if I die, I will die doing His will."

Luya looked at Zavier steadily. "You speak the truth," she said finally. "I know you, Zavier, and you're a weak fool. It must have been a great power who brought you here."

Despite Luya's insult, Zavier looked as pleased as he had when I had finally admitted that writing might be useful. "Exactly," he said.

"I will think on this," Luya said, and stalked off to bed.

THE SNOW CAME TWO WEEKS BEFORE FIRST WINTER'S NIGHT. FIRST just a little bit, ankle deep with the last of the autumn crops poking out. Then the next day, a real snowstorm. Zavier sat with me near the mouth of the cave, watching the flakes spinning down like feathers. The Trial was actually harder if it *hadn't* snowed, unless it

was an exceptionally warm year, but Zavier looked bleak. "I just realized that I'm never going to see Baltimore again," he said, when I asked him why he was sad. "Even if I make it through the Trial, I don't think I'm ever going home."

"You'll like the snow," I said. "Once it stops, we'll show you."

It stopped the next day, leaving heaps so deep I sank in well past my knees. We all pulled on our furs and our (now mended) boots—we loaned Zavier some warmer clothing, since he hadn't brought anything really adequate—and went outside. Merik packed a snowball and threw it at Luya, who shrieked and ducked behind a tree, quickly making a snowball to throw back at him.

"I've never seen so much snow," Zavier said. "It snows in Baltimore every year, but not like this."

"I'll teach you to slide," I said, and grabbed his hand. We kept part of the riverbank clear just for sledding each winter; I pulled Zavier to the top, then tucked myself into a ball and slid down, holding my cloak around me so that the snow wouldn't get inside. Once we'd smoothed down a chute, I showed Zavier how to sit and pushed him off. He screamed like he thought he was about to die, but held on tightly to his cloak and came to a rest at the edge of the river. I ran down the hill to help him back up to the top.

"See?" I said. "Wasn't that fun?"

"You have a unique idea of fun," Madri, Zavier said, but he was grinning and let me pull him back up to go again. He was shivering in the sharp afternoon wind, though, even with the clothes we'd given him. I looked at him sadly. I feared that I would be making paper by myself in the spring.

FIRST WINTER'S NIGHT BEGAN WITH FEASTING. FOR ALL HIS TALK about his faith, Zavier was frightened, but I could hardly blame him. He was far less accustomed to the cold than the rest of us facing the Trial, and we were all frightened, except for Luya.

After the feast, we lined up on the icy riverbank; Zavier stood between me and Luya. The Shaman faced us. Our Shaman was an old man, thin and stooped, but he told stories as well as Luya. "Long ago," he said, "there were no clans and there were no Children of the Winter King. All the world lived together in one huge village. Then the Winter King came to separate light from dark."

We recited with him: "Separate light from dark, water from snow, strong from weak. The Winter King came to bring order." Zavier didn't speak, though I was sure he knew the words by now.

The Shaman spoke. "The Winter King brings cold to make us strong."

The rest of us said: "As long as the Children of the Winter King accept His rule and His gifts, we shall always endure."

"Go, then," the Shaman said. "Prove yourselves worthy."

Luya stepped forward first. Unlike the rest of us, she had come out barefoot, wearing only a fur cloak; now she simply threw the cloak back and dropped it to the snow at her feet. Rather than pulling her hair forward to cover what she could, she shook it back, baring her body. Her skin was pale in the winter moonlight that reflected off the snow. I could see Zavier trying not to stare at her, and I could tell that Luya saw him, too. She laughed, throwing her head back so that her dark hair brushed the curve of her hips.

The rest of us undressed. I pulled off my boots reluctantly. All this work to mend them, and maybe now I wasn't even going to get to wear them again. I wondered who would get my boots, if I didn't survive the night, and shook my head. It was bad luck to think about failing.

Zavier pulled off his robe. It was the first time I'd seen more of his body than his feet, face, and hands. The skin of his belly sagged a bit, like he used to weigh more back before he walked all the way from Baltimore. His skin was as pale as the white of an egg, as if the Sun had never touched anything but his face; I could see blue veins running like thread under his skin.

The Shaman gathered up our clothing. "May you be acceptable to the Winter King," he said. "I will see you in the morning." The Shong clan—the adults and those who were still children—turned their backs on us and went into their caves.

Luya clasped my arm. "Shall we warm each other, Madri?"

I looked at Xavier. "Zavier, come with us. We'll keep each other warm until morning."

Zavier's teeth were already rattling. "I can't touch a woman. Not a naked woman, not when I have no clothes on."

Luya laughed mockingly. "Are you so full of lust that you think you'll be making a baby tonight? Go ask the boys to keep you warm, then."

"God will protect me," Zavier said.

"Come on, Zavier," I said. I should have shown him earlier how to dig down into the snow to stay warm. "You can sit with us."

Zavier looked torn. Then—"All right," he said, and followed Luya and me into the woods.

Luya and I dug down into the snow near the cliff. "Won't sitting in the snow make us colder?" Zavier asked, crouching down and wrapping his arms around his knees.

"No," I said. I was shivering too much to explain further. Luya didn't even look cold, of course. There was an overhang in the rock, and Luya and I quickly built up walls of packed snow. When we were done, Luya crawled inside and I followed her. Luya held out her arms, and I nestled down where she could curl herself around me. "Come on," I said to Zavier, and he crawled in. There was just enough space that he could sit without touching either me or Luya. Zavier and I were both too cold to talk for several minutes. Then Luya's body heat warmed our shelter a little, and my shivering eased. It would be a long night, but at least I could believe now that I'd live till morning.

"Madri," Zavier said when his teeth had stopped rattling too much to speak, "if I don't make it through the night, I want you to have my book."

I could feel Luya's chin go up against my back. "Don't say things like that," I said. "It's bad luck."

"Sorry," he said.

Time passed. I could hear Zavier whispering something. "What are you saying?" Luya asked sharply.

"I'm praying," Zavier said. "I'm saying the Rosary." He shifted. "We recite certain prayers many times. It's supposed to be a good thing to do, but mainly ... I find it comforting."

"Tell us one of your stories," Luya said. Her voice had the edge of a taunt in it. "It will help pass the time, and it'll spare Madri the effort." Zavier was silent for a moment.

Then he said, "Once, long ago, there was a clan called the Hebrews who were being kept as slaves by a clan called the Egyptians."

"Had they been taken in a raid?" Luya asked.

"No," Zavier said. "The Hebrews left their own land because there was a famine. They lived with the Egyptians, and it wasn't until many years later that the Egyptians decided to enslave them."

"Go on," Luya said.

"One day, one of the Hebrews, a man named Moses, was out walking, and he saw a bush burning—but for some reason, the bush burned and burned but wasn't consumed."

"That's impossible," Luya said.

"With God, all things are possible. Moses stopped to stare, because it was such a strange thing to see. And God spoke to him from the fire: God had chosen Moses to lead the Hebrews to freedom."

"Why Moses?"

"Moses asked the same question. 'Why me?' You see, Moses was not a young man, nor a handsome man. He was not a great warrior, and—he was not a good storyteller."

My mouth was dry in the cold darkness, and I knew that Zavier was looking at me.

"Moses tried to persuade God to change His mind, but God would not. And so Moses went to the clan leader of the Egyptians and said, 'Let my people go.'"

Zavier's voice grew firmer as he told the story: God sent plagues on the Egyptians, parted the waters, led the Hebrew clan to the Promised Land.

"Why do you think God chose Moses?" I asked, when Zavier was done.

"I think God likes to choose the unlikely," Zavier said, "to show that it is God's power that accomplishes what must be done."

"Yours is a god of the weak," Luya said. "I have seen no miracles."

"God doesn't perform miracles on the command of his followers," Zavier said.

Luya stirred. "I tell you what, Zavier. You're doing all right in here, where the two of us can warm you even if you don't touch us. I think anybody could survive the night in a shelter like this. Go outside our shelter. Spend the night outside, Zavier. Then I will believe that a truly great power sent you. Then I will believe in your god."

Zavier stirred. "You'll believe?"

"Yes."

"You'll swear that to me, with Madri as a witness?"

"Yes. I swear on my honor as Merik's daughter and a member of the Shong clan."

"All right, then," Zavier said, and began to break a hole in the side of our shelter, where the wall of snow was thinnest.

"Wait!" I shouted. "Zavier, you're crazy. Nobody spends the night out in the wind. We all dig shelters and warm each other. None of us could survive the night out in the open, not even Luya. Stay here."

Zavier turned back. "If I can persuade Luya, everyone else will follow. Otherwise—" He shrugged. "I'll see you in the morning." He left.

"How could you make a dare like that?" I said to Luya.

"How could he be so stupid as to do it?" Luya said, grabbing handfuls of snow to seal us back in. "He'll be back. Don't worry."

Time passed. Zavier didn't come back.

"I'm going out to look for him," I said.

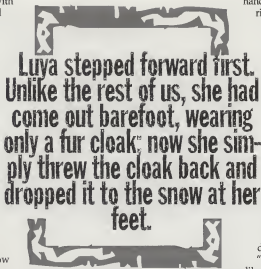
"Are you crazy?" Luya asked. Her arms were warm around my body, and for a moment she held me so tightly that I could hear the rapid beating of her heart. "You'll freeze along with him."

"I'm not going to stay out there," I said. "I'm just going to try to convince him to come back in." For a moment I thought Luya was going to hold on to me, to keep me from leaving, but she relaxed her grip.

"I'll be here when you come back," Luya said.

Outside was bitterly cold. Zavier hadn't gone far; he'd tried to dig himself a little bit of a shelter, just a tiny one, but had mainly just succeeded in burying himself in snow. I knelt beside him.

Continued on page 72





*Love can create and destroy,
but fear can fill our souls with ice.*

WHEN BEASTS EAT ROSES

"And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper."

GULF OF SPEZIA, ITALY: 1822

THE TWO MEN IN THE BOAT WATCHED THE STORM ROLL TOWARD THEM across the bay. The yellow-haired pilot guessed that they might be able to outsail it; the passenger thought that the idea was madness, and began trying to reef the sail, making a half-hearted joke as he did so about their fortune in sailing a boat named after a spirit of the air. The pilot put out a hand to stop him, and then the storm hit them, grabbing the boom and snapping it back and forth like a cat with a mouse in its jaws.

Both men were too occupied with the sails and the tiller to notice a dark shape in the water nearby. It might have seemed like a clump of weeds, but for its purposefulness as it moved through the water, or like some freshwater shark, but for the arms and hands that pulled it through the water with effortless grace.

The hand that grasped the gunwale was the color of the insides of a fish. For a moment the dark shape obscured the name, *Ariel*, on the side of the boat, and then it pulled itself up so that its face was visible to the men struggling with the sheets and pulleys.

BY BRUCE GLASSCO. ILLUSTRATION BY BROM

The passenger might have said a word like "Caliban" when he turned and saw the grinning face illuminated by a lightning flash, but the thunder that followed fast on its heels erased any word as clearly as if it had never been spoken. The next moment the speaker was erased as well, dashed against the mast and falling limply to the deck like a wet sack of jelly. The pilot had a slightly better guess as to what was standing before him, stretching out its enormous hands. Even as those hands picked him up and hurled him out into the darkness, though, he did not name the creature, for he knew that it had no name. His last word was "Mary!" as he flew into the teeth of the storm, as his body became one with the rain and the lightning and the wild west wind.

BATH, ENGLAND: 1816

Mary had her first premonition of disaster while still writing the novel. All four members of the household had returned from their journey to Switzerland wrapped in private worlds. Young William's was the simplest: At nine months his greatest accomplishment was to stand unaided. Her lover Percy Shelley had begun writing "The Revolt of Islam," and at such times the singing of his personal seraphs could drown out even the baby's wailing.

Mary's stepsister Claire was pregnant and beginning to show. Percy's friend Lord Byron, the father, had abandoned her as everyone had told her he would, and she spent her days alternating between hysterical bouts of crying and an icy anticipation of the baby's birth that was more disturbing than tears.

Mary surrounded herself with drafts and revisions of her novel. The closely written pages lay spread before her like a corpse; she dipped her crisp-cut pen in the inkwell and ran it through a word, and the word was no more. An overfilled pen would speckle the paper like blood, but Mary was a careful surgeon. Her words stretched across the pages like veins and nerves and tendons shaved clean, growing and twining in ways she had never anticipated. As the thing gained shape and solidity it appalled her; sometimes she almost relived the horror she had felt that night in Switzerland when she woke from her nightmare of a man created by man. The remembered horror drove her, obsessed her; often it seemed more real to her than the sunny plateau which her life seemed to have achieved. Disaster, she knew, was never far away. Writing about it, she prepared herself for its inevitable reappearance.

She pulled a fresh sheet from the pile and began her fourth chapter. This one would be easy, for it was mainly a copy of the short story she had set down in haste in Switzerland. "It was on a dreary night in November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils."

THE NEXT MORNING MARY WALKED INTO HER study to discover shreds of her manuscript lying about, their pet cat Genviève crouching balefully above them with paper in her jaws. Percy heard her shriek and rushed into the room to find her in the act of flinging an armchair pillow at the cat. Her aim was poor, and the cat escaped in a gray streak through the open window.

"The filthy beast!" she cried. "She has been devouring my manuscript!"

Percy examined the writing table. The pages were scattered about the floor like whitecaps in a storm, and sure enough, several showed

signs of being chewed upon. One was missing most of a corner, with half the page damp from feline spittle.

"It's all right," he reassured her. "Look, this one page will need to be recopied. Ten minutes' work, at the speed of your pen. See here—only a few words are missing. 'His yellow skin scarcely covered' and a blank, and then 'a lustrous black, and flowing' and another blank. Nothing you can't easily redo."

He knelt on the floor and began gathering up the pages, handing them to Mary to be re-ordered. She was relieved to find nothing else missing.

"As if we didn't feed the creature enough, though!" Mary opened the drawer of the table and placed the manuscript firmly within. "What on earth could have possessed her to so unnatural and unhealthy an appetite?"

"An appetite for mischief, no doubt." The poet knelt on the settee to look out the window, but the devourer was nowhere to be seen. "I remember, when I was revising 'Queen Mab' I left the stopper off the ink bottle, and our Tom upset it and spoilt the whole copy."

"Oh no!" cried Mary, secretly relieved that she was not the only one foolish enough to leave manuscripts lying about. "What did you do?"

"I recycled it, of course. What else could I do? That and brag to my friends that I had been visited by Queen Mab herself in the shape of a cat, come to repay me for doing her the honor of writing about her. But I have an even greater fear this time."

Mary chuckled. "What is that, pray tell?"

"Why, that in the process of ingesting your masterpiece, the beast may have absorbed some part of the horror of your story!"

Mary's hands flew to her mouth in mock terror. "True," she breathed. "After all, we did find the kitten in Geneva, just as I was beginning to write it. Perhaps now it is breeding within her, ready to hatch out in who knows what hideous form?"

Percy moved around behind her and slid his arms around her waist. "You will wake up one black midnight," he whispered in her ear, "and you will feel a soft footfall on your pillow beside your head." Mary gave a delicious shudder in his arms.

"Yes," she said, "I will open my eyes, and there will be our Genviève, eight feet tall and possessing superhuman strength...."

"Looking down on you with watery and speculative eyes," he finished.

Mary sounded wistful. "We shouldn't laugh. Perhaps it would be a gentler way of bringing new souls into the world."

Percy held her silently until her tension lessened. "Yes," he whispered, "I know. Birth can be a frightful thing."

They had met at the tomb of Mary's mother while courting, he the scandalous anti-establishment poet who had abandoned his wife, she the brilliant 17-year-old daughter of two brilliant writers. Together, they read her mother's memoirs. Mary Wollstonecraft had been entirely unconcerned at the birth of her daughter—"I expect that we shall see the animal by tomorrow," she had written the day before. Then came the complications—the placenta was not expelled, like an invisible twin sister who preferred to remain in darkness. The doctor spent hours picking bits of it out of her, but she died anyway, days later, in agony.

Mary had been deathly afraid at the premature birth of their first child, two years before the trip to Switzerland. She had recovered from the birth, but the baby had not. Twelve nights after they buried the tiny corpse, Mary awakened Percy in the middle of the night with a cry—the baby was only cold, she had dreamed. If they rubbed it by the fire it would revive. Now, in the waning Sun of early Octo-

THE NEXT
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THE DECK.

ber, she leaned against her husband as if seeking warmth from that chill touch once again.

"If only there was another way to give birth," she sighed after a long pause. "Something like ink and paper, but softer. . . ."

There was a crashing from the garden, and Claire appeared, resting a basket of flowers on her swollen belly. "Percy!" she cried, "I've been trying to find you. These are the last roses of the year, and I cut them for you."

THAT NIGHT, THE HOUSEHOLD DREAMED.

In William's dream he could walk and speak. He dreamed that, as he ran through a forest, a hideous creature grabbed him. "Let me go!" he cried, "My papa is a Syndic—he is Monsieur Frankenstein—he will punish you!" But the creature held him tighter and tighter, and the child saw that the hands that gripped him were the hands of his mother.

Percy dreamed that as he walked in the garden, he turned a corner and met himself. It was a dream he had often, but he had not yet worked up the courage to address himself, or the wisdom to know what questions he should ask.

Claire dreamed that she was in a strange city, her belly flat once again. She knew that she had given birth, but she was unable to remember anything about the child except that it was lost. With rising panic she rushed from stranger to stranger, but each one answered her in a foreign tongue and turned away. Standing on a corner, a man with a mask and a twisted foot was working a shell game. Clipped aristocratic fingers rearranged the shells faster than her eye could follow, and then he beckoned her to choose. "That one," she said, pointing with a trembling hand, and he flipped it over to show emptiness. Claire pushed her arm aside and grabbed the other two shells, but they were empty as well. With trembling fingers she pulled off the stranger's mask, and behind it was nothing but a gaping void, out of which came hollow laughter that surrounded her like the sea.

In Mary's dream she was Prometheus, chained to a rock as punishment for bringing fire to mankind. Instead of a vulture, it was a cat that approached to devour her liver. It would be a kind of birth, she thought—after all, the Greeks believed that the liver was the habitation of the soul. The cat was tearing a passage lower down, though, in a kind of inhuman Cesarean operation. Mary gritted her dream teeth in agony and leaned her head forward to see what it would drag out of her, the head of a child or the scarred head of a monster, but instead she saw that inside she was filled with roses. Dark red rose petals filled the cat's mouth and trickled to the ground like blood.

Genvieve, the cat, slept without dreams.

Claire's unborn child dreamed that there were voices coming to her through the walls of the narrow space where she floated in darkness. She woke up to listen, but when she opened her eyes they were gone. Listening for their return, she floated wide awake until dawn.

IN THE MORNING, MARY FOUND PERCY SHAVING AND DRAGGED HIM into the garden. "Come and look," she cried, "the cat is eating roses; she'll turn into a woman! When beasts eat these roses they turn into men and women!"

Percy recorded the incident in his diary that afternoon, and later asked her what she had meant by the outburst. By that time she was only able to remember the incident dimly—perhaps, she thought, it had only been an extension of her dream, though Percy was the sleep-walker of the family. It was a fact, however, that neither of them ever saw the cat again.

VENICE, 1818 ITALY

By the time Mary met her creature face to face, she had already begun to suspect that a dark shadow might be following her.

She had held suspicions earlier, when her half-sister Fannie and

Percy's former wife Harriet committed suicide within weeks of one another. As each of her two children, William and Clara, were born, her nervousness increased. At the time, though, she could not have begun to name the vague fear that gnawed within her like a worm at a rose's heart.

They were staying at one of Byron's villas in a picturesque Italian village when tiny Clara became ill. They left William with his nurse and rushed to find a boat to take them to Venice. All the way down the river Clara twitched convulsively in Mary's arms, her tiny eyes squeezed tight, suffering too much even to cry.

When they reached an inn in Venice, Percy went to find the doctor that Byron had recommended, while Mary sat in their room rubbing the tiny hands, watching the breaths grow shallower and shallower. The rubbing seemed a pitifully inadequate gesture, like trying to fight off the Angel of Death with a feather or a spoon. For the first time she regretted the atheism she shared with her husband; she wanted someone to bargain with, or to blame.

When midnight came she felt ready to scream. Instead, she went into the hallway and stood by the door like a rigid knot of tension. When she finally felt calm enough to go back into the room, her monster was sitting in her chair, holding her dead child in its lap like the other Mary carved by Michaelangelo.

A life spent with a poet given to reverie, a man who could fast for days at a time if she did not remind him to eat, had often left Mary feeling on the thin edge of the boundary between dreams and reality. The death of her child was a nightmare, and somehow it made sense that it was also a continuation of that other nightmare in Switzerland, as if she had only dreamed of being awake during the past two years, giving birth to a novel and a son and a daughter. It did surprise her, slightly, that the monster had the shape of a woman. It was proportioned like a child's drawing of a woman, various thicknesses piled on top of one another in a way that suggested architecture more than anatomy. Its skin was as gray and knotted as the dead baby's was white and smooth.

Mary closed the door behind her and leaned against it. "I should have known," she said flatly. "I should have known that somehow you would become real. Through you I have destroyed my own child."

The creature raised its head to look at her, brushing thick black hair from its eyes with a hand as gnarled as a thornbush in winter. It nodded. "Yes," it said, and its voice was like the shifting of rocks in the sea. "Perhaps if I had not come you would have blamed yourself for not seeking a doctor sooner, or for wearing her too soon, or for coming to Italy in the heat of summer. But I am here, and I will help shoulder the blame for you. It is true that I have come to take the vengeance of the created upon the creator."

"You killed her," Mary's voice had gone flat with the strain of staying upright, and she closed her eyes to make the image of the dead child go away. "You killed them all, Clara and Fannie and poor Harriet. I knew I was somehow to blame, living too much in my mind with you and not loving the ones around me enough. I knew I was to blame and now, now I see I was right! I knew I deserved punishment for bringing you into the world, and now you are here. Tell me, are all creators haunted by the horrors they have made?"

The creature shrugged. "I don't know. You are the only creator I have."

"Are you . . . Genvieve? The cat who ate the roses?"

The shadowy figure was silent for a long time. "Partly," it said finally. "It's hard to say. Listen: You enjoy imagining how the heroes of antiquity would act if they were reborn in your own time, do you not?"

Mary shook her head slowly. "No. . . ."

"Never mind. You will later. A 17th-century Englishman frozen in ice, a Roman brought back to view his country's decline. These are things you will write."

Mary swayed against the door frame, but the monster did not appear to notice. "Did it ever occur to you that, in the future, people might wonder about you?"

Mary gasped, a tiny sound like a choking sob. "I was 18 when I

wrote you," she whispered. "Even the ones who loved me never called you immortal. At best, they called you a promise of better things to come."

The creature smiled, showing ragged, yellow teeth. "Nevertheless," it said, "the Modern Prometheus will be more famous than the original. Young children frighten one another with my creator's name. I have lost the power to speak there, but still, I am remembered." It began to rock back and forth in the chair, looking down into the face of the dead child.

Mary swallowed. "Why?"

"I don't think you realize how busy people are going to start getting, in a few years, with making things. Making things and then losing control of them. Whenever you make something, whether it's a child or a book or a bomb or a thinking machine, if you do it without love then one day you may turn around and find it coming back to kill you. That's when people remember us, Mary."

Mary felt the door frame behind her slipping out of her grasp, along with her holds on reality and consciousness. "Why come back, then?" she asked desperately. "Why take vengeance on my other children?"

The monster shrugged. "Perhaps, in the future, they made replicas of the characters they still remembered, and perhaps one of the replicas was unhappy with its life, and found a way to escape into the past, and sought vengeance. Or perhaps, when enough people have believed in something for long enough, it becomes true not just for their time but for all times. Or perhaps I was born on your writing table when your cat ate the roses. What does it matter? You know why I am here."

Mary shook her head. "I do not know. Tell me."

The monster laid the body of Clara tenderly on the bed's rough fabric, and turned to look Mary full in the eye. "I love you," it whispered. "Give up the others and love me, me and me only. You can create more like me...."

"I can't," said Mary sharply. "The others ... William and Percy ... they need me too much."

"Then destroy me! Kill me! Renounce the part of you that made me, the part that kept you shut up in your study when you might have been watching your children! As long as I am a part of you, nothing else you love will ever be safe!"

Mary shook her head again as if to clear it, let go of the door frame she had been clutching, and staggered across the room toward the bed where her daughter lay. There her legs gave out and she collapsed on the floor, her hand stretched toward the small corpse but unable to touch it. Something was building inside of her like fury or despair, and she waited to see how it would come out.

"It isn't fair!" she cried at last. "Do men have to make these choices?"

The creature shrugged again. "I'm not sure. As I said, you're the only creator I have. As far as I know, though, men only have one way of giving birth. And when they speak of being destroyed by their creations, it's nothing but a metaphor. We know better, don't we, Mary? Me, you, and your mother?"

Feet pounded down the hallway, and Mary heard Percy's voice. When she looked up from weeping, Clara's body was still on the bed, but the creature was gone.

insistence she had given her daughter away to be raised in a convent, and she had not seen the girl for almost a year. Mary knew that Claire was desperate to see her daughter, and also knew that Percy had pleaded with her to remain here, to keep an eye on Mary and make sure she did no harm to herself.

Moonlight pouring through the wide windows illuminated most of the room, but Mary sat in a corner of darkness. Her black dress was almost invisible, but her death-pale face shone in the night like a second moon. A picture of William lay in her lap, but she seemed to lack the strength to look down at it.

The room was on the third floor, but she was not surprised to hear a step on the balcony, or to see the shape of the monster as it opened the window. It hesitated for a moment, then crossed the patch of moonlight like the shadow of a witch flying across the Moon. When it reached the darkness before Mary's chair, it sank to the ground in front of her, regarding her with eyes like wells of midnight.

If she rushed at it, Mary wondered, would it kill her with its bare hands? It looked strong enough. William had been strong, strong and beautiful and healthy. Everyone had said so. The servants liked to go into his room just to look at him as he lay asleep.

Every day of a child's life, she saw now, was like a hook that sank into your flesh. You never felt them when they went in, and the longer the child lived the deeper into your skin they worked. Memories: little Mary sucking at her breast, Clara laughing, and most of all William as he grew and talked and disobeyed and loved, William shouting out echoes from the wall of Este castle, William watching Percy making paper boats on the Arno, William suddenly ill for the first time in his life. All the hooks were ripped out when the child died, and you thought that the pain was more than you could bear, but the next time they were sunk even deeper, and yet still somehow you lived.

"I should be dead, too," she whispered to her creation. "If you must kill people, kill me!"

The monster shook its heavy head. "I can't kill you. I love you."

Mary did not scream, but her voice sounded like a scream in her own ears. "Why, then? Why do you keep destroying me, piece by piece, child by child?"

The monster fixed its watery gaze on her. "What do you think the reason is?"

Mary closed her eyes and bit her lip. "I ... I didn't love them enough. I wasn't the mother I could have been. And I was proud. I helped Percy abandon his first wife, and when I had children I thought I had triumphed over her. Even when Harriet killed herself, I was glad because I was stronger. Like the gods punished Niobe for boasting about her children ... or Prometheus ... my mother ... Fate has punished me through you...." The tension that had been holding Mary upright sagged, and she began to weep.

"So," said the creature. "And why does your husband believe that the Christian god is false?"

"Because of his cruelty for—p—punishing us for our sins," Mary gasped out through her tears. "Oh god, when we rid ourselves of one avenger must we always turn and create ourselves another?"

"Now you are beginning to understand. Tell me, is your husband much comfort in your hour of despair?"

Mary drew a handkerchief and dabbed at her tears. "My husband," she said. "He still believes that God can redeem the world, that Love can protect us. So did I believe, once. In his newest poem he is writing that Prometheus can be unchained, but I ... I know better now."

"You see," said the creature. "Now you are truly alone. Even your father sends a condolence letter in which he begs for money. No one understands you but I. They are weak—as soon as you love them, they wither like roses in December. I am strong and immortal. I love you. Make more of me."

LIVORNO. 1819
ITALY:

It visited her again a month after William's funeral.

Claire was asleep in a chair by the door. On the desk before her was a letter she had been writing to Byron, explaining why she would not be able to come visit Allegra, her daughter. At Byron's

I KNEW I WAS TO BLAME, LIVING TOO MUCH

Mary shook her head, her eyes closed. "You have killed the person I was when I wrote you. I could not make another, even if I wished to. Besides, if you are the creature from my time of happiness, then how hideous would be the creature of my despair?"

The monster gave a twisted smile. "Nevertheless," it said, "when beasts eat roses, there is no turning back. Love me."

Mary shook her head wildly. "Love you! You are my worst enemy! I hate you!"

"That will be close enough. If you hate me, then follow me."

"Follow you? Where are you going?"

The monster scuttled across the patch of moonlight like a crab and paused in the window, looking back over its shoulder at the pale face surrounded by darkness. "Where am I going?" it said with its grin stretched wide and ghastly. "You wrote it, did you not? At the end of your story, when I no longer desired the company of Man. I am traveling to the frozen places of the heart."

When Claire woke before sunrise, stiff from sleeping in her chair, she saw that the penknife from the writing table was gone and the window open. A horrible fear ran through her, but when she rushed to the balcony she saw that Mary was hard at work. The neatly trimmed pen swept line after line down the page, and the ink was the same color that blood would have appeared in the predawn light.

Eighteen months later, Mary sent the proofs of *Matilda*, her second novel, to the printer. "I sought the end of my being," her main character said, "and I found it to be knowledge of itself." But Mary knew that, for her at least, self-knowledge was still more terrifying than death.

BAY OF SPEZIA, ITALY: 1822

If there was one thing Mary was good at, it was packing. By the time she was 25, she and Percy had moved their household more than seven times. They usually kept their books, forwarding them from house to house in boxes and trunks. All the rest—furniture, kitchenware, toys for the children—they picked up and dropped along the way. Mary liked the process of leaving things behind, pruning her life. It let her pretend that she had no attachments.

The family was leaving Pisa for a small villa called Casa Magni on the Bay of Spezia, supposedly because the Pisan climate was foul in the summer. There was another reason as well, which had to do with why Lord Byron was staying behind, but that was still more or less a secret. Mary and Claire, along with their friend Trelawny, had been sent on ahead to prepare the house, while Percy stayed in town to close up their old home.

Although the crew of the chartered boat clearly knew their business, Trelawny apparently felt the need to bustle about. He was everywhere—coiling rope in the bow, asking the sailors questions, blocking the pilot's view. Mary ignored him as she sat across from Claire in the cockpit. Three small trunks were stowed near her feet—the bare minimum to which she had reduced her life. In her lap she held the year-old Percy Florence, her sole remaining child. She clutched him to her breast like a life preserver, staring backward down their wake with haunted eyes toward the shrinking towers and sails of Pisa.

Mary had finally mastered the art of not quarreling with Claire, which lay chiefly in paying no attention to anything her stepsister said. She was becoming gradually aware, though, that Claire's prattle had become even sillier than usual.

"Claire," she said finally, "could you please leave off the execrations on Lord Byron's character for a few minutes, and explain more

fully this plan of yours?"

"It's very simple." On the surface Claire seemed the picture of calm reasonableness. "I've already forged the letter—on account of my knowing Albé's handwriting so well, don't you know?"

Irony was dripping from Claire's voice. His Lordship had not written to her in months.

"We'll need Percy to deliver it, of course—the nuns would never accept it unless it came from a man. As soon as we've rescued my daughter from that dreadful convent, we'll need to leave the country—Switzerland, do you suppose? Allegra will be five now, and I'm sure she won't mind the traveling. When I last saw her two years ago..."

"Claire," said Mary firmly. "Claire! Listen to me. It's not going to happen. Firstly, Percy would never do anything to deceive his friend. Secondly, were he to do so, Byron would follow us and in all probability challenge him to a duel, which Percy would have no choice but to accept. And thirdly... thirdly..." She faltered.

"Thirdly?" said Claire icily.

"Never mind. It is a thoroughly stupid plan."

"How can you say that? Two spots of color began to pulse on Claire's cheeks like angry hornets. "How can you say that when the climate of this pestilential country has already destroyed two of your own children?"

"Enough!" Mary half rose from her seat, and Percy Florence awoke from his nap and began wailing. Carefully, Mary relaxed her white-knuckled grip around him and sat down again.

"Oh Mary, I'm sorry..."

"No, that's quite all right. It is I who should apologize to you. I know how—loss—can make a person say things they later regret. Claire..." she paused.

"Yes?"

"I have some advice for you. Try—try not to care so much."

Claire shook her head, puzzled. "I beg your pardon?"

"These things we create—these things we make inside ourselves. They have the power to destroy us only if we let them. And we don't have to let them, Claire!"

Claire stared at her stepsister, startled for a moment out of her brooding. "That's your advice? Stop caring?"

"Yes. If there's any way that you possibly can."

Claire put her hand on her stepsister's arm. "And what if somebody truly needs you, Mary? What then?"

Mary looked down at the bundle in her arms, now busily sucking its newly discovered thumb. "True," she said. "If it were not for this one, I'd—I don't know what I'd do."

"It's not the baby that I'm talking about!" Claire tried to force her stepsister to look at her, but Mary avoided her eyes. "What about your husband, Mary? He needs you so much!"

Mary frowned. "He didn't need me much when he was spending all his time with that Viviani girl. Or with Jane Williams, of all people. He seemed to be getting along just fine without me then."

"After you'd already cast him aside!" Claire's voice was pleading now. "I know you still care for him, but he feels such coldness coming from you, and he needs so much warmth..."

"Yes," cried Mary. "And why does he need warmth? How can he still believe there is so much light in the world, after all the deaths, all the darkness, the children who die and die and die until nothing is left but us and our demons."

"They all die but Percy Florence and Allegra," said Claire quickly. Mary answered with a choking sob.

"Mary," said Claire carefully. "Mary, look at me. Look at me!"

Fearfully, Mary raised her head, and Claire stared into her eyes.

Suddenly Claire let out a sharp cry. "Allegra is dead, isn't she?"

Mary nodded in misery. "Typhus..." she began, but was unable to go any further. Percy Florence left off sucking his thumb and

IN MY MIND AND NOT LOVING ENOUGH.

began wailing again.

"That was the news you had three days ago, when you decided to move us out of Pisa so suddenly. You didn't want me to be in the same city as Albé when I heard the news. I told everyone that horrible nunnery would kill her, I told them, and you knew I'd call him to his face the murderer that he is ... you—you were too much of a coward to let me hear him, because if I was—if I was ...!"

Claire's voice rose and rose like the wind on the Bay of Spezia, filled with spray and howling through the rigging. Percy Florence's voice rose in competition as he wailed, and Mary closed her eyes tightly to keep in her tears as the boat rounded the last cape and sighted Casa Magni.

SUSSEX, ENGLAND: 1849

The house in Bath where the cat ate the roses would have fit comfortably into the dining hall of Field Place, the ancestral home of the Shelleys. When Mary joined her son and his wife at the enormous table, she often wondered what her husband would have made of the vast emptiness of his father's inheritance, had he lived long enough to see it—her husband, who had spoken loudly and often against the petty cruelties that went along with wealth. She herself was too tired to struggle against it, now that wealth had arrived at last with the death of Percy's father.

The three of them sat close to one another for warmth at one end of the vast room. A bouquet of spring flowers picked by Jane, tulips and lilacs and honeysuckle, brightened the dark oak of the room.

Mary watched her son Percy Florence as he swallowed the last of his trifle. He seemed healthy, even robust, but that did little to reassure her. He had inherited his father's sun-like mane of wild and uncontrollable hair, but his eyes, his sad eyes, were hers alone.

"And now," he said, pushing back his chair, "darling wife, my darling mother, I've saved the best news for last. You know how I hate to stay away from the two of you, but the extra day in town was worth it. It's something I've always wanted—can you guess?"

"Oh, just tell us, Flo dear." Jane Shelley was not quite pretty, but she came close when she watched her husband.

"Old Peter is going to build me a yacht. Imagine! Warnham Pond will be perfect for sailing in the summer and autumn, and I'll be able to invite up Fred and Billy from the city..."

"Flo," his wife interrupted him, "look at your mother. Can't you see she's white as a ghost?"

Mary was still gazing vaguely in his direction, trying ineffectually to keep the smile from slipping off her face. She felt as if her son had picked up the fruitknife and stabbed her with it.

"Don't be silly, my dear." Befuddled, the young man looked back and forth between the two women. "Mother doesn't mind me sailing, despite ... well, surely she doesn't mind. Why, she's shared a boat with me herself, years gone by—when we took that lark from Cambridge. You remember, mum."

Jane reached over and patted her hand, which trembled. "Mother," she said, "if you'd rather Flo didn't get his yacht, please go ahead and say so."

Mary looked from one to the other, searching for words. "It's wrong for me to dwell in the past," she said. "If Flo wants to go sailing, I shall not attempt to dissuade him."

"But what do you want, mum?" Percy Florence pulled his seat closer to hers. "If I thought for a moment that I was causing you pain when I went sailing, I should have sworn it off forever at once! You always said yourself that it was father's greatest passion, before..."

"Now look what you've done," said Jane reproachfully, for Mary had risen abruptly to leave. "Of course it's torture to her, and of course she would never say so. Now promise at once that you will give up this boat-buying scheme and stay firmly on the ground where both of us can keep an eye on you!"

"I've been stupid, haven't I?" Percy looked sheepishly from one woman to the other. "I do so solemnly swear." His expression was so remorseful that his wife burst into laughter. "I'd best go write a letter to Old Peter and tell him to cancel." He pushed back his chair and strode echoing across the hall.

"I really didn't mean to interfere like that," Mary looked beseechingly at Jane. "I feel I've been such a burden to the two of you—and you've both been so good to me."

"How could you be a burden to us?" said Jane, smiling, as she crossed the room to ring for a maid to clear the dishes. "I had loved your stories even before I met you, and Flo would move heaven and earth."

"I know that," said Mary brokenly. She was feeling her habitual reserve slipping away from her like a lifeboat at sea, with a mingled sense of desperation and relief. "But I still don't understand why."

Jane stood by the bell-pull uncertainly. "What do you mean, mother?"

"Oh, perhaps it's not worth talking about. But ..." her voice caught. "I've always felt that I haven't been as good a mother to Flo as ... well, as I might have been if things had worked out differently."

Jane glided across the room and took the older woman's arm. "Come into the garden, mother," she said. "Come into the garden and we'll talk about it."

The garden was in that splendid phase just before the beginning of summer, when the springtime flowers seem to realize it is their last chance to make a display before going to seed. The arches above the path were heavy with color and promise.

Jane listened twice around the path to Mary's recitation of her fears for her son—her disappointment when he had failed to show the genius of his father, her worries that he would be picked on by the boys at Harrow the way his father had been tormented at Eton, her constant concerns about money.

"He has much to reproach me for, I fear," she said finally. "And you ... dear Jane, you are more like the sister I should have had than my son's wife. If there's anything I can do to make up for those years..."

"Hush," said Jane. "He blames you for nothing. Only..."

"Only what?" asked Mary, reaching to pluck a stem of lilacs that overhung the path.

"I shouldn't say—only that he always felt, somehow, that you kept a great distance from him. As if you were somehow afraid of him, afraid of what he might do, and so you never let yourself be too close. And I would have said nothing, to be sure, only he told me yesterday that he feels you have changed since you retired from your writing and came here to live with us. Changed for the better. And I was wondering if that was true?"

Mary walked silently for a long while, picking more lilacs to make a bouquet. At last she said, "Yes, it's true. There were other things—that I preferred to love more. Can we ever truly love another person as much as he needs to be loved?"

Jane flushed. "I have always believed so," she said quietly.

"So did I, once! But if I had loved him enough, he would have taken better care of himself!" The old woman's voice became soft and softer, as if buried under all the flowers, and Jane saw that the subject of the conversation had changed. "Did you know that a fishing boat saw them in the storm, and they said that Percy was stopping Ned from reefing the sail? I was so cruel to him, those last few weeks in Italy ... my tongue so sharp. Life was a burden to him and it was my fault, my fault..."

"I'm sure he knew how you truly felt, however you acted," said Jane. She was expecting a squall of tears, but the older woman's eyes were as dry as stones. "If he was the man you say..."

"He was just a man," said Mary. "Like many others. When you love people they just die, and die, and die, but when you love a thing—a book, an idea—you can make it last forever. Books are better than people, because they don't go away and leave you alone."

"Do you really believe that?" said Jane, and she put her arm cautiously around the frail shoulders.

After a moment Mary relaxed and leaned against her. "No," she said. "Not since I saw the two of you together. It reminds me of old times ... the paper boats, and the roses."

Her eyes were still dry, but her voice caught in her throat when they turned the last corner in the garden and walked down the aisle where the roses were blooming.

Mary sat on the end of her bed that evening, combing her hair. It was all gray by now, and very long. The room was lit by a tall candle on the dressing table. There were few other furnishings, for after her life of moving she had found little that she wished to hold on to. Opposite the bed was a small shelf of books and magazines.

"*The Last Man*," said the creature from over her shoulder, as she had expected. It often came up behind her in those days, when she looked at the shelf and didn't look back. "*Valpurga* and *Matilda*. All those stories in 'The Keepsake.' You did well, Mary." It put its weighty hand on her shoulder.

"Poor Percy Florence." She didn't turn around, but went on combing methodically. "I ended up even worse than his father, I suppose. We both spent too much time loving Things because they're Eternal, and not enough loving people because they aren't. If only the Things could love you back, that would be the best of both worlds, I suppose." She reached up and touched its rough hand with her own. "Truly love, I mean. Not the cold comfort we have known."

"Don't rule out the future, Mary."
Mary turned to look at the twisted face.
"What do you mean?"

The creature sat on the bed beside her, and held her shoulders with both hands as it gazed into her eyes like a mirror. "Do you realize how much those people will love you? Not the way you are now, of course. But everyone who ever encounters you will fall in love with the 17-year-old runaway, the daughter of two great writers, who lived in a house with the two most brilliant men of her age, and who had bad dreams. Because for a moment, even though we know it's all bound to go wrong, you make us believe that there might be a better way. Even as our creations turn against us, your creator reminds us, as he lies insane and dying, that where he has failed another may succeed. Percy will be remembered as a great poet, have no fear, but your name will be coupled with mine more than with his, as long as people make machines and make children and can't get either one to behave. Think about it, Mary!"

"I'm thinking," said Mary. For a moment she thought she saw the future spreading out ahead of her like a sea of stars, but the sight brought her no comfort. She turned her back to the creature and stared into the candle on the dressing table.

"No," she said. "It's a different kind of Eternity I should be thinking of now. And there's something else I should tell you as well."

The creature waited, running its rough hand like briars through her hair with the practice of long intimacy.

"After all these years," she went on, "I'm letting my heart go again. You know it anyway, I'm sure, but I thought I should tell you."

"Who is it, finally?" the grating voice whispered in her ear, still stroking. "Not that ridiculous Trelawney with another proposal, or that Irving fellow with his horseman *sans* head?"

"Neither, as you well know," she said stiffly, and put its hand aside. "But I've realized how strongly I care for those two children in there. They're so very alive—it's been so long since I've remembered what it felt like. And I think ... I think this time it will be enough. I've finally realized something that Percy knew all along, something I had forgotten."

"What is that?" whispered the creature, resting its hand again upon her shoulder.

"What I remember now is that death doesn't matter. I mean, when you love somebody, you've got to love them as though they will never die. It doesn't matter whether or not you believe in an afterlife—you've got to love them as if you do. Otherwise, the living hurts as much as the dying. It's like eating the thorns and leaving the roses alone."

There was a long silence, and then she felt the creature slip its hand away. With the hand she felt sliding off the last vestiges of a weight she had been carrying with her for as long as she could remember, from the first day she had learned the reason why other children had mothers and she did not. "You've escaped me, then,"

she heard the thick voice say at last, and though she knew its inflections as well as she knew her own, she could not tell if it was sorrowful or pleased.

"All my life." She shook her head, trying to remember or imagine the life that lay outside those books on the shelves. "All my life was a cat chasing its tail. Throwing myself into my work to escape the guilt for all the deaths, and then when the deaths came again the guilt was worse because I was working when I should have been there. No more, at last, no more. Neither you nor I can take on the guilt for all the death in the world. It is far, far greater than we are."

She felt the monstrous shape move closer behind her on the bed and lean forward to whisper in her ear. "It was a good life, Mary. Don't look back in regret. You did what you had to do." Then she felt the cold thick lips pressing against her cheek like a stone. "You won't see me again, but I will see you once more, at the end. Goodbye, Mary."

She turned and reached up to touch the gnarled face, but the creature was gone. After a while she slowly lowered her hand to her lap again, and for a long time she sat listening to the hall clock tick. When she finally blew out the candle she discovered that, for the first time in a quarter-century, her cheeks were wet with tears.

WITHIN THE YEAR, MARY WAS DEAD. PERCY Florence bought his boat soon after. Jane added to Mary's long work of editing Percy's poems, providing him with a reputation that would stand for centuries. Then they died, and as they left no children, the name of Shelley died with them. Claire lived to be a very old woman, until after an unlikely conversion to Catholicism she died in a convent in Italy, still cursing her lover and mourning her dead child.

But Mary's creature lived on, hiding and scuttling through the crevices and corners and shadows of a world made bright by the light of science. Once the thing was created it could never be unmade, for when beasts eat roses the world can never return to the place where it once was, long, long ago. ■

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Sometimes dreams come true in unexpected ways. Especially if they're unexpected dreams.

WILDERNESS LIVING

By Kate Riedel

Illustration by Eric Dwyer

Sandy had spent most of his weekends that summer on Ontario Highways 4 and 6 between Owen Sound and London, ever since Jenny had been side-swiped while roller blading in a mall parking lot and ended up in Western Hospital in traction.

The third time going back, rather than face Sunday evening traffic, he turned north off 4 onto 23, then northwest on 8 at Mitchell. Then, keeping the Sun to his left, he navigated neglected farmland on a network of increasingly ill-kept tar and gravel roads until, through luck as much as navigation, he came back to Highway 6 just south of Owen Sound.

As for Jenny, he supposed it was only natural a 15-year-old girl wouldn't welcome visits from a man more than three times her age whose only claim on her

was that he was her biological father. Oh, he'd sent her birthday and Christmas presents, paid his share of dentist bills and school fees ever since Belva had gone to London to finish her MBA, taking Jenny with her and somehow never coming back. But fatherhood was just something that had happened to him. Like his career, his marriage, and his divorce.

"Why do you bother?" Belva asked outside Jenny's hospital room door. Belva took pride in being blunt.

Because this accident, Sandy thought, this random meeting of metal with flesh, like a flash of lightning on a dark night, has shown me that what I unthinkingly helped bring into the world could just as unthinkingly be taken from it.

But he couldn't say that to Belva.



This hot Sunday afternoon found him drowsy at the wheel; not even the breeze from the open car windows helped. At last, on a narrow gravel road, well away from any yellow brick farmhouse, he found an unused lane overhung by trees, no more than a level crossing over a ditch. He pulled into the shade, lowered the back of the seat, and went to sleep.

He awoke to dusk. One or two rays of sunlight drew gold lines across the darkened grass and pine needles. The car was full of mosquitoes. Sandy slapped at them, got out, stretched, and walked toward the sunlight, loosening cramped muscles.

From darkness into a great light: a broad meadow, its edges blurred by encroaching poplars and rising at the far side in a pine-covered slope. The expanse of ragged flowers already showed the beginnings of the dry brown of summer under green and magenta, gold and white. The breeze that fluttered the poplar leaves lifted his hair, brought the pleasant chill of evaporating sweat.

And in the barred brilliance of the last light stretching the shadows of the pines across the meadow, a fox trotted away from him among the flowers. Now it paused, head up, ears forward. Leapt in a fluid arc, to rise with something—a mouse? Fur like flame as it almost floated over a log and disappeared among the young poplars.

"I saw a fox last Sunday," Sandy told Jenny.

Jenny, wearing an oversized T-shirt with the slogan "Authentic Sportsweat!" pulled over her hospital gown, continued to concentrate on a handheld video game while a friend from school leaned over her shoulder. The other girl, who wore a T-shirt with a picture of a timber wolf under a full Moon, reached around Jenny for the menu she had ticked off and left on her lunch tray.

"How can you eat meat, Jen, it's so fucking gross!" She clapped her hand to her mouth as she realized that Sandy was in the room.

"I'm a vegetarian," she said in his direction, as if offering an explanation for the obscenity.

"How's the property settlement coming?" Belva asked Sandy when they met outside the door.

"My lawyer should already have talked to your lawyer. How long will Jenny be in the hospital?"

"End of July, the doctor hopes. You don't have to drive down here every weekend, you know."

"I know."



nce he'd turned off the engine he hesitated to get out of the car. He knew little about magic, but he did know that you can't count on it repeating itself. The inspiring song on the radio becomes only silly when you see the words written out; the little café imbued with romance when you breakfast there with your girlfriend after being out together all night is just a greasy spoon when you go there a few days later.

But the meadow, bright flowers barred by the lengthening shadows of the pines, reached out to him with all its evening-dewed freshness. From the woods behind him, a bird repeated three wistful notes. He cocked his head, listening.

Mary Chu had a real law office, but she preferred to do business at the back table of her favorite coffee shop.

"You did really well on this house," she said, sliding the papers into the brown envelope. "I should have the check next week. You say Belva's going to put her half into an education fund for Jenny. What about you?"

"I don't know," Sandy said. "I wanted to keep the house, you know." He'd held on to the big old Victorian house in Owen Sound, rattling around in it, hoping, until....

A woman stood there, her long limbs ready to carry her away at the slightest sign of danger.

"You could always invest it in other property."

"Maybe some kind of trust fund for Jenny, if that doesn't sound like one-upmanship on Belva."

"Why not spend some of it on you? In all the years I've known you, I don't remember you ever buying anything for yourself. No trips, no RV, no cottage, not even a new computer. Don't you ever do anything just for you?"

He shrugged uncomfortably. "I've started running again."

Mary burst out laughing. "Whatever for? How tall are you, six feet? One-hundred-fifty pounds?"

"Five-eleven. One-hundred-fifty."

"Oh, grossly overweight! So why did you start running?"

"Promise not to laugh?"

"Promise."

"A week and a half ago I saw a fox running across a field. And that night I dreamed I was running with it. And it felt so good—you're laughing."

"No I'm not. Was it a female fox?"

"Yes, I didn't think about it at the time, but I'm sure it was, at least in the dream."

"Aha! I hope it was a Chinese fox."

"Why?"

"Korean foxes, they're just vampires. Japanese foxes aren't quite so bad, but they're unreliable. But a Chinese fox, if you treat her right—"

"Are you hinting at something?"

"I might if I thought it would do any good. I really like you, Sandy, in spite of the fact that at age six, when any other kid wants to be a

fireman, or a rock star, or an astronaut, you probably already wanted to be an accountant."

"I didn't. I wanted to be a woodsman."

"A what?"

"A trapper. A hunter. I used to eat up boys' books about wilderness living. Zane Grey, Jim Kjelgaard, Ernest Thompson Seton. They were probably old-fashioned even then, but I didn't care. I wanted to live out in the wilderness, hunting and trapping and living off the land."

"Honestly, Sandy, here you are in the middle of cottage country, the world's best hiking and canoe trails practically in your back yard, campgrounds—"

"I don't want to go camping. My only camping trip with the Boy Scouts—jeez, tents cheek-by-jowl and rows of cottages lighting up the far side of the lake just didn't qualify as wilderness."

"You're a hard man to satisfy." Mary finished her iced coffee and rose. "Well, you know where to find me."

Envelope tucked under his arm, Sandy walked idly down the street, a little tourist row of coffee shops, galleries, a book store.... He stopped to look at the display in the window of the book store, then opened the door and walked in.

The next Saturday Sandy took the back roads south to London, a knife and a jar of water beside him in the car.

"Brought you something," he said to Jenny, setting the jar full of meadow flowers on the bedside stand and pulling out the book he'd bought. "I thought we could—"

"Oh, Dad, pu-leeze! Reader's Digest?"

"Just look. On my way back home I've been driving past this ..." He opened the book, *Reader's Digest North American Wildlife*, to a section at the front. "... old meadow, just like it says here. Where trees were cut, or maybe there was a field or pasture, and now it's going back to the wild. I saw a fox there, and heard a bird that sings chee-o-wee—"

"Dad!" Jenny said, embarrassed. Sandy blushed himself at his weak imitation, but plunged on.

"I think it's a wood thrush. And there were all these flower, I thought we could look them up together. This one—" He turned to the flower section, pointing to a purple flower that he'd cut from the edge of a little swamp near the laneway. "I think it's Joe Pye weed...."

Jenny sighed, hunched down in the sheets as far as the traction on her leg would allow and switched on her Discman.

Crows yelled in the tops of the trees. They rose and settled a short distance off as Sandy opened the car door.

What had they been looking at, there in the ditch?

He stepped to the edge of the low embankment, distressed at the sight of the dead fox that lay there. It had been shot, but had apparently not died immediately, dragging itself this far before letting go of life.

Sandy looked up at a movement on the other side of the ditch, under the trees. A woman stood there, her long limbs ready to carry her away at the slightest sign of danger. Golden eyes met Sandy's; tears streaked her face.

He stared at her a moment, then dropped his eyes to the ditch and went momentarily dizzy.

Recovered, he got the shovel from the car and dug a hole in the soft loam under the trees. The crows watched from above as he picked up the small, stiff body, its fur still soft on his palms, and buried it, while the wood thrush sang far away.

"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head," he said aloud.

When he looked up the woman was gone.

He remembered her tangled, red-gold hair and golden eyes, but couldn't have said how she was dressed; he had a vague memory of a long skirt, something like a house-dress from a century ago.

"I tried to get hold of you last night," Mary said. "But you weren't in. Run into traffic coming back from London?"

"I stopped to bury a dead fox."

"Oh no! Not the one you told me about?"

"No, this one was male."

"Do you think it might have been her mate?"

Sandy shrugged. "Foxes mate for life. Of course for them, life is only three or four years."

"My, we're melancholy today, aren't we? Anyway," tapping the envelope between them on the table, "don't invest it all in one place. There's travel agencies that specialize in wilderness trips. Why not take one while you can still enjoy it?"

He shook his head, examining the reddish hairs on his arms and remembering the crows calling as he looked down at the man in the ditch. Skinny, almost scrawny, with reddish-brown hair, red hairs on bare arms picked out by the setting sun. The dulled, staring eyes and stiffly sprawled limbs left no question that he was dead....

The sun was barely up Saturday morning when Sandy arrived at the meadow. As he stepped out from under the trees he saw the woman crossing the far slope under the poplars. This time he ran after her, catching up before she entered the pines.

In a clearing just under the pines was a small log cabin with a veranda allowing a clear view of the meadow between the poplars.

The woman stopped at an old pump supported on a platform of tamarack logs, laid down a dead partridge she carried, filled a dipper, drank, and held the remainder out to Sandy. It was cold, and tasted of iron.

She sat on the edge of the veranda to pluck and gut the partridge and cut it up. He sat beside her and watched her work, and when

she went into the cabin, one room for kitchen, sitting, and bedroom, he followed and lit the wood stove for her. She ladled some fat from a tin into a cast-iron frying pan, and fried the partridge.

They ate directly from the pan with their fingers, sitting across from each other at a bare table, crunching and sucking at tiny bones as they looked out the window over the veranda.

When they finished she washed her hands in a basin, then pushed it across to Sandy so he could do the same.

Then she stretched out on the bed built against the wall, on her stomach so that she had a good view out the open door. When Sandy hesitated she patted the mattress. He took off his shoes and stretched out beside her.

After a moment he put an arm over her and drew her to him. She laughed and moved closer, but when he kissed her on the mouth she moved away.

"Not now," she said. "It's not time."

"No," he said, surprised at the lack of regret as his erection subsided. "It's not, is it?"

She curled up against him then and slept. He watched the day brighten through the poplar leaves, happy in the scent of her hair, sweet and dusty, like yarrow under the noon sun, until he slept himself.

It was noon when he awoke. She remained curled up when he rose to leave, but opened one eye and smiled at him when he kissed her on the cheek.

"You're late!" Jenny said accusingly when he walked into her hospital room that afternoon.

"I'm sorry, hon, I overslept. I guess your friend isn't here today?"

She gave him a dirty look.

Sandy looked around, at a loss. The jar of flowers was gone; well, he couldn't expect them to last forever. The book was buried under a stack of paperback novels.

"How does this work?" he asked, picking up the electronic game.

"It doesn't. The batteries are dead." She shut her eyes.

Sandy waited a minute, then left quietly and went down to the hospital gift shop.

When he got back to the room Belva was there. She stepped out and closed the door before he could go in.

"You idiot," she said.

"What? What did I do?"

"The reason her friend Kim isn't here is because Kim's out at a movie with Jenny's boyfriend."

"Boyfriend? She's only 15."

Belva gave him one of her looks. He silently handed her the batteries he'd bought.

"They're the wrong size," she said.

Since he was obviously a pariah, Sandy left, picked up a hamburger at MacDonald's, and went to a movie because he thought it was one Jenny might have enjoyed. Back in his motel room he lay staring at the ceiling and thinking of the stars above it.

After grabbing a fast breakfast Sunday morning—MacDonald's again—and stopping at a drug store, he proceeded cautiously down hospital corridors to Jenny's door.

A young man with a half-shaved head, baggy pants, and a T-shirt blazoned "The Real Thing!" sat opposite Jenny, dealing cards.

"Hi," he said as Sandy came in the door. "You must be Jenny's dad. I'm Todd. I'm teaching her to play gin. You play?"

Sandy lay the batteries—right size, this time—on the bedside table beside the book and sat down under Jenny's smile to pick up the cards Todd dealt him. It was enough that it was a smile; it didn't have to be for him.

He stayed for some of the pizza Todd brought in as a change from the hospital supper tray, and so it was dusk when he pulled off onto the laneway.

The woman was there, standing among tall flowers. Yarrow, buttercups, milkweed, mullein, tall meadow rue. He could name them now, thanks to the book. Her head was turned toward him, alert and listening.

As he approached she stooped and snatched something from the flowers about her knees. He was just in time to see a grasshopper leg disappear into her wide mouth.

She dropped to a sitting position, laughing at the expression on his face. "Try this," she said. She picked a milkweed pod, no bigger than a peach pit, held it out to him, and with the other hand picked another for herself and popped it into her mouth to demonstrate.

Sandy, after only a slight hesitation, did the same. "Tastes like raw zucchini," he said after a moment.

"Is that good?" she laughed.

"It is if you like zucchini," he laughed back.

With another lightning movement she brought up her hand to hold another grasshopper, still buzzing, out to him.

"Go on," she said, dangling it, still struggling, by one leg in front of his face. "If you don't eat it, I will."

He took it cautiously, pinched it to kill it, but had to close his eyes before he could put it in his mouth and bite down. He couldn't have said what it tasted like, but he was surprised to discover he liked the way it crunched.

She caught another one, and he reached for it, but she shoved it in her own mouth. "You have to learn to do it for yourself, you know," she said around it.

He sat very quietly, eyes down. He could see each grain of soil, every exposed root, the dried, grayish, curled leaves at the bottom of the stems, the fresher green ones farther up, the veins clear as if brought into focus under a microscope. It was a whole world down here, where earthworms and moles turned the soil, tiny iridescent green bugs lived and died. His ears strained to catch subterranean scrapings, dry rustlings among leaves and stems...

He snatched at the grasshopper, so close he could feel the movement of its wings against his hand. The woman caught it as it escaped his fin-

"Wednesday. Your wife didn't tell you?"

Sandy shook his head.

The nurse reached under the desk. "This was left in her room. Maybe you could take it to her." She pulled out a padded envelope.

The book, Sandy thought, feeling its bulk. She didn't even bother to take the book with her.

He thanked the nurse and returned through corridors and elevators to the lobby, crossed the hot pavement of the parking lot to his car, put the package on the passenger seat, and slid behind the wheel.

"I love you, Jenny," he said aloud, just to see what it felt like.

Well, Jenny was old enough to start looking after herself.

He turned the key in the ignition and headed out of the parking lot and west on Highway 4. He turned north on 23.

Mary Chu's boots crunched in the January snow as she stepped out of the car.

There was no other car anywhere. Well, there wouldn't be, at least not the car she remembered. That one had been sold to a garage in Desboro.

"All I know, lady, is he was walking when he left," the owner told her as he gave her the payment for the car and a package from the front seat, a big padded envelope. Since it had already been opened, she went ahead and looked at its contents.

A sheaf of heavy paper, perhaps from a sketchbook, and carefully glued to each sheet a pressed plant, labeled, "Evering Primrose." "Yarrow." "Buttercup." "Cinquefoil." "Joe Pye Weed." A note in an unfamiliar round hand was clipped to the top sheet. "For Dad, love, Jenny."

Sandy had apparently meant her to open the envelope: A second note read, "Mary: Please put these in the safe deposit box."

"You know the law," the policeman had said. "A man's free to do what he wants with his life. It's not a missing person when it's an adult, voluntary, no evidence of crime. You say yourself he's made all the arrangements for his property."

He had indeed, making sure there would be funds to pay the taxes

It's not a missing person when it's an adult,
voluntary, no evidence of crime...

gers, and ate it herself. "You'll learn," she said. "For now I know something you'll like better."

She rose and sprang away, running fast and easily. Sandy was pleased to find he had no trouble keeping up. She halted at a bank of wild raspberry canes, and they stood opposite each other, eating the sharply sweet fruit greedily, and laughing.

As the Sun dropped below the horizon she quieted, staring across at him, and only as her pupils widened to accommodate the dark did he realize they had not been round before.

She disappeared silently into the woods beyond the raspberry canes. Such a tangle of scents drifted back to him. Pine, and damp, and moss; faint, dry aroma of fur, mushroom, feathers... how could he ever sort it all out?

"I need a property title searched," Sandy told Mary on Monday afternoon, and read off, over the phone, the township and concession road number, names from nearby mailboxes. "Sorry," he said as she started to ask a question, "can't talk, I was late to work this morning. Catch you later."

"Will wonders never cease," Mary said into the dead phone.

"Oh, sir!" the nurse called from behind the floor desk, just before Sandy turned down the corridor to Jenny's room. "Sir? Didn't you know? She's been checked out."

"What?" Sandy turned back. "When?"

on this acreage until it passed on to Jenny when she turned 30. On the condition that it never be sold. "Never's not a legal term," Mary had told Sandy.

"Find one that is."

She looked up at his voice, but he was wearing sunglasses—indoors—and she couldn't read his expression.

According to the papers there was a log cabin on this land, there back under the pines, she thought, but there was nothing to indicate life; no smoke rising, no driveway.

No tracks in the snow at all, except for those of rabbits, mice—

And a pair of foxes, side by side.

Foxes mated about this time of year. Mary knew that because she'd read it in a book. Mated for life.

She squatted and examined the tracks a moment. "Living off the land, eh?" she murmured as she rose.

A life span of only three or four years, Mary had said. But if a fox managed to live to 50, it could take on human form. If it lived to a hundred, it became a magician, and at a thousand, a celestial fox.

She wished she could say she'd learned that from her grandmother, but she'd only read that in a book, too.

The setting Sun cast a long line from each dry plant sticking through the crusted snow stained pink with sunset, blue with shadows. Far away, from the direction of the cabin, she heard a high-pitched bark.

Mary Chu returned to her car and to Owen Sound. ♦

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ONE HUNDRED years ago, a diverse group of English artists defied strict Victorian conventions dictating which subject matters, and media, were deemed suitable for the “serious” artist. These rebellious young painters turned from acceptable subjects (such as classical and biblical scenes) to portray Celtic myths, Arthurian legends, fairy tales, and romantic poetry, using colors and symbols considered shockingly bright and crude to Victorian critics. Ignoring these critics, the Pre-Raphaelite painters brought imagery from ancient magical tales into fine art galleries and museums; artists such as William Morris, Charles Ricketts, and Charles



Shannon turned such tales into exquisite hand press books; watercolorists such as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac produced lovely illustrations for children’s fairy-tale volumes; while Phoebe Traquair, Arthur and Georgie Gaskin, and the other artists of the Arts and Crafts movement worked this imagery into murals, stained glass, metalwork, textiles, and ceramics. In the years to come, these artists became respected masters in their various fields—and their beautiful work, standing the test of time, still enchants us today. Despite our general assumption that modern



IN IMAGERY FROM *SANDMAN* TO *STARDUST* TO OLD BRITISH (LIKE THE BALLAD OF “TAM LIN,” ABOVE RIGHT), CHARLES THE TALENTED MODERN HEIR OF THE GREAT VICTORIAN FAERY



BY TERRI WINDLING

CHARLES VLESS

FOLKLORE
Vless is
painters.



Artistic influences ranging from Arthur Rackham and Howard Pyle to "Little Nemo's" Winsor McCay can be seen in the mythic lyricism Charles brings to the comic book form.

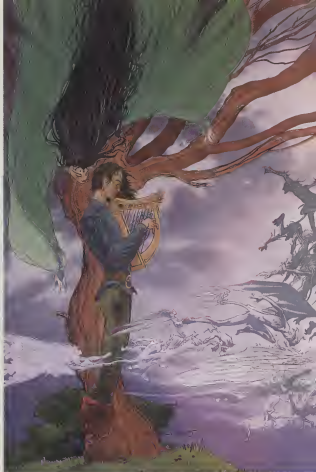
art has few equivalent taboos, there are nonetheless still subjects and medias the "serious" artist is expected to shun.

Today, when a painter like Charles Vess uses his considerable talents to illustrate legends and fairy tales, and (worse!) to do so in comic book form, such work may be dismissed as pop culture or commercial art by some stuffy art critics, and yet it's as slyly subversive as that of the young Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones ... and has captivated large audiences for many of the same reasons. By wedding mythic and folkloric material to a distinctly modern form of visual storytelling, this artist is keeping myth alive, and creating a magic all his own.

CHARLES VESS was born in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1951. He spent most of his formative years playing in the fields and forests surrounding his family's home—or else he was usually found hunched over a table, drawing. "I am told by my mother," says Charles, "that I never wanted to be read to sleep with fairy tales. Now I look at my work and the subject matter of most of the stack of books by my bed, and I can only wonder why. Perhaps those stories were

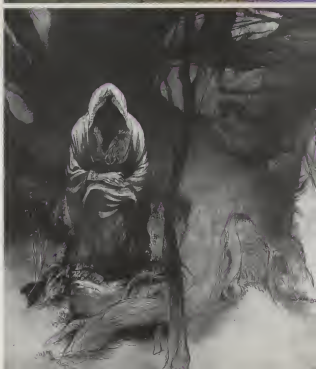
too vivid, my imagination too active to let my youthful mind drop off to sleep after hearing them.... I can't remember a time when I wasn't sitting with a pencil in my hand, drawing something. My parents were very supportive of my efforts. They always managed to find me some kind of paper to work on. Early on, I filled those blank sheets of paper with leaping, cavorting superheroes from the comic books I was reading. In my first year of high school I discovered J.R.R. Tolkien's Ring Trilogy. Soon thereafter, I devoured my way through The Sign of the Unicorn books [Lin Carter's line of gorgeous Fantasy novels for adults] and my life and my art were never the same again. Before then, I had only brushed the surface of myth and folklore as a subject matter for my art. Reading those classic Fantasy novels fueled my imagery and turned me away from the brightly colored world of Superman and Batman. And I never looked back."

After receiving a degree in fine art, Charles graduated with a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University, then worked for several years in commercial animation for Candy Apple Productions in Richmond. In 1976, he moved to New York and became a freelance illustrator working for publications such as *Heavy Metal*, *Singer Sewing Machines*, and *National Lampoon*, as well as on numerous



comic book series from *Doctor Strange* to *The Warriors Three*. "I was desperate for rent money in those days and had to work for anyone who would hire me—so I spent several years drawing the comic book characters whose early exploits I had read as a young boy down at my local barber shop. However, the deeper I delved into the incredible treasure trove of story, myth, and legend that exists within the mythologies of this planet, the more dissatisfied I became with what I had to work with at Marvel or DC. Instead of waiting for a publisher to come knocking on my door with a job that I *might* be interested in, I began to develop projects of my own to present to them. I didn't meet with immediate success; the children's book editors said my work was too sophisticated for their audience, and the editors of the 'adult' publications thought my work too lyrical for theirs. The editors at *Heavy Metal* finally gave up on me entirely, saying my work was too 'nice' for their tastes."

At the time, Charles worked from a studio he shared with fellow artist William Michael Kaluta on Manhattan's Upper West Side, his drawing table wedged into a room crowded with bookshelves (packed with art texts, fiction, and folklore), music recordings (particularly Celtic folk, bluegrass, and world music), and natural objects (stones, feathers, shells, and the like) gathered from lands around the world and his extensive travels in the British Isles. As his superhero work gained prominence, winning several presti-



gious awards in the comic book field, Charles explored other, more mythical book projects, including *The Horns of Elfland* (Archival Press) and *The Raven Banner* (Marvel); he also taught at Parson's School of Design and created images for reproduction as limited edition prints. His work was featured in various exhibitions in galleries and museums, including The New Britain Museum of American Art, the Delaware Museum of Art, Four Color Images Gallery in New York City, and the Mythic Garden sculpture exhibition in Devon, England. He was also one of six artists profiled in the book *The Dream Makers* (Paper Tiger Press).

In 1988, The Donning Company commissioned Charles to create some 40 paintings and drawings for a new edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "I needed a project that could bring me closer to the myths that I loved, yet also put bread on the table," Charles recalls. "Fortunately I managed to talk an editor at The Donning Company into the idea of an illustrated *Midsummer*. Drawing and painting those pictures was a glorious experience. Every day I attacked the drawing board with a frenzy of renewed energy. Picture after picture seemed to quite literally draw themselves. It was only with great effort that I pursued my personal life. With each new drawing that flew from my fingertips I could see my ability to draw the human figure grow by leaps and bounds. I was suddenly able to conceptualize and then to draw those images that I saw, both easily and accurately. It was then that I realized that a great story can reach within

the room to expand his work into several new directions. He designed a 30'x50' wall sculpture based on Appalachian "Jack" tales for the Southwestern Virginia Community College, created set and costume designs for the Barter Theater's production of *Peter Pan*, and produced a series of very large drawings on ballad and mythic themes. With Cindi DiMarzo (currently a children's book editor at *Publisher's Weekly*), Charles curated a major exhibition of modern artists following in the tradition of Rackham, Dulac, and other influential figures from the turn of the century. Called "Dream Weavers," the exhibition featured over 40 original works by Alan Lee, Brian Froud, Gennady Spirin, William Michael Kaluta, Jim Gurney, Alicia Austin, Scott Gustafson, Ruth Sanderson, Dawn Wilson, Dennis Nolan, Jerry Pinkney, Terri Windling, David Christiana, and Charles himself. "Dream Weavers" opened at the William King Regional Art Center of Virginia and then traveled to museums across the nation; it was also featured in a Gallery of *Realms of Fantasy*, with an introduction by Charles de Lint.

It was after Charles and his wife moved to Virginia that they founded their own company, Green Man Press, in order to publish a project that brings Charles's three great loves together: art, storytelling, and music. Called *The Book of Ballads and Sagas*, this project (originally published as a comic book series, now collected in a trade book format) enlists modern writers to retell Irish, Scottish, and English traditional folk ballads, accompanied by Charles' magical illustrations and assorted notes on the ballads themselves. Thus far, the



These enchanting paintings from *Stardust*, a story created with author Neil Gaiman, demonstrate the painter's love of myth, folk tales, and faery lore.

and plumb those deep inner recesses, engendering artistic impulses that are rich and true and creating a uniquely personal vision. In time, I realized that it was this quality of a "personal vision" that I had always sought out, responded to, and wanted more of from other artists, be they painters, writers, or musicians."

In 1990, Charles began his now-famous partnership with British writer Neil Gaiman, working on Neil's darkly magical *Sandman* series (issues #19 and #75, DC) and *The Books of Magic* (the mini-series, issue #3, DC). In 1991, Charles and Neil were awarded the World Fantasy Award (in the "Best Short Fiction" category) for their collaboration on *Sandman* #19—the first and only time a comic book has held this honor. It was around this time that Charles left Manhattan and moved back to rural Virginia, where he lived in a rambling old farmhouse and worked in a rebuilt smokehouse out back. He soon outgrew this small work space and moved all his books, music, and art supplies to a larger studio in a nearby village, where he finally had

Ballad series includes "The False Knight on the Road" by Neil Gaiman, "King Henry" by Jane Yolen, "Thomas the Rhymer" by Sharon McCrumb, "Barbara Allen" by Midori Snyder, "The Galtie Farmer" by Jeff Smith, "The Daemon Lover" by Delia Sherman, "Twa Corbies" and "Sovay" by Charles de Lint, and Elaine Lee's rendition of "Tam Lin." (More ballads are forthcoming.) In 1997, Charles won the Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for work on *The Book of Ballads and Sagas* (as well as for his art in *Sandman* #75). "Over the last 20 years I've been listening to Scottish, Irish, and English folk music," Charles explains when asked about the inspiration behind the series. "There is something in the imagery of these ancient and not-so-ancient ballads that resonates deep within me. Perhaps it's that these songs, with their eclectic mix of story elements that have been continually transformed by the oral tradition for hundreds of years, have within their mix the raw, basic elements of myth and truth. Whatever it is, I love to listen to them and it has



been a rare treat to participate in their tradition by drawing them."

THE MOST recent project to emerge from Charles's studio is the long-awaited *Stardust* (DC/Vertigo), a thoroughly spell-binding "high fantasy" story told in narrative graphic form, created in collaboration with Neil Gaiman. Set in a village at the edge of Faerie and drawing upon a wealth of Celtic folklore, the story sparkles with Neil's subtle prose reminiscent of great early fantasists such as George MacDonald or Hope Mirrlees, accompanied by Charles's beautiful art steeped in the 19th-century "Golden Age of Illustration" tradition. For this project, Charles has created over 175 paintings, conjuring the vivid imagery of a plot that runs from Victorian England to the dark outer reaches of Faerie. *Stardust* has been honored with the 1999 Mythopoeic Award, and Charles also carried off a well-deserved World Fantasy Award for Best Artist last year. "Creating the paint-



ings for *Stardust* was an exhilarating but very exhausting experience. My brain and my hands are very tired, so I'm going to take a vacation, see some art, hear some music, and juice up my batteries," Charles said at the completion of the project.

But now (his fans will be pleased to hear) he's back in his studio once again, deeply involved with new drawings and paintings, new book ideas, and ballads. I can picture him clearly (even though I'm a

thousand miles away as I write these words): There's Celtic music on the stereo, crows beyond the window, cats at his feet, books all around him, and faeries flickering in the Virginia twilight. Charles is hunched over a table, just like he used to be as a child. He's drawing, dreaming, keeping magic alive for generations of children to come. ♦

For more information about the art of Charles Vess visit his Green Man Press Web site at: greenmanpress.com

War! What is it good for? Lots of cool games.

BACK IN 1969, AS PART OF HIS PLANET OF ADVENTURE SERIES, JACK VANCE PUBLISHED A novel called *The Dirdir*. The Dirdir were a race of predatory aliens that held the lands wherein the gems used as money on the rest of the planet were scavenged. The Dirdir allowed members of all the other races on the planet into the gem lands, with the understanding that the Dirdir could hunt and kill anyone found there. This made gem prospecting a dangerous but profitable profession. Adventurers from all over the world came to try to elude the Dirdir while searching for the hidden fortunes. The Dirdir liked the arrangement since they didn't have to look for the gems themselves, and they got great sport from the hunting—until the book's human hero showed up. He put together a band of adventurers and made them all rich by pointing out there was no need to face the dangers of hunting for gems themselves; all they had to do was hunt the Dirdir hunting parties in turn and take the gems off the aliens' corpses for a change.

I bring this up, and ruin one of the best moments in a classic Science Fiction novel for you, because it is this revelation that it is often easier to hunt the hunters than it is to face the monsters that has driven the play and design of online Fantasy role-playing games since they began as text-based adventures run over mainframe networks to users on dumb terminals. The programmers might design all the fancy monsters, rooms, traps, and settings they liked, but there have always been players who were more interested in lurking near the towns and taking the hard-won loot of players who

did actually go out into the wilds and adventure for it. Every age and society has had its highwaymen. The information age with its gaming societies is no different.

The answer to brigands in an online game has taken many forms. *Asheron's Call* (PC-Windows CD-ROM, \$54.95 plus a monthly fee to the MSN Gaming Zone), from Turbine Entertainment Software and Microsoft, uses the two best. The simplest one is programming the game not to allow players to kill each other's characters. This forces players to pit their characters against the dungeons and monsters of the programmers' devising, and for most people that is more than enough challenge. But not for all people. There are gamers who, like the fictional Dirdir, enjoy the thrill of testing their skills against other player characters. The online death-match boom has been driven by players like these. In FRPGs they are called player-killers.

Asheron's Call makes both player-killers and the rest of us happy by having five different servers on which their game world of Dereth is maintained. The terrain and monsters and non-player characters are the same on each, but players are spread out over all of them to keep any one server from becoming too crowded. One of these servers is dedicated to player-killers. Players cannot, however, simply log on to the player-killer world and have at it. They have to put in their time first, learning the world and the game, earning enough experience that they are then allowed to go on a special quest. Once the characters have completed this quest, they are allowed to do combat with one another.

The oldest way to avoid brigands, and the second that *Asheron's Call* encourages, is simply to travel in a band of your own, one stronger than the thieves' bands. It is a common drama in online FRPGs for a killed character to respawn in a town, tell everyone that he or she has been attacked by bandits, and call everyone within ear shot to band together to go dispense justice (or at least death and a stripping of their own treasure) to the outlaws. On the nonplayer-killer servers of AC, this forming of posses is not needed to hunt outlaws, but it is still very

BELOW: You too can join the forces of good or evil in an attempt to conquer the world in *Age of Wonders*. RIGHT: One of the four human races featured in *Asheron's Call*.



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useful for fighting the programmed mon-
sters and menaces of the world. In fact, it is
this banding together that is really the point
of an online FRPG.

Two features of *Asheron's Call* encourage
players to band their characters together: fel-
lowsips and allegiances. Fellowships are
straightforward. Another character offers
your character a fellowship, you accept, and
suddenly the two of you can talk to and track
one another. The fellowship can be ended at
any time, but usually it is maintained until
some stated objective ("Let's kill this herd of
cows.") (Don't laugh, cows are dangerous,
low-level monsters in Dereth that attack in
herds.) is finished.

Allegiances are more formal and have
more give and take. While they include all
the communication and tracking advantages
of fellowships, they are also hierarchical and
feudal. Characters give their allegiance to
another character, creating a vassal/patron
relationship. The patron character now auto-
matically earns an experience whenever the
vassal earns experience normally. If that
patron has a patron of his own, that patron
also gets a bonus, and so on up the line. In
addition, the number of vassals a patron has
determines his allegiance rank. Some mag-
ics in the game can only be used by charac-
ters of a certain rank or higher. What is in this
system for the vassals? Whatever the patrons
want to give them. Money, weapons, protec-
tion, anything they have that a lower level
vassal might need. Allegiances can be
dropped at any time. It is up to the patrons
to keep their vassals happy.

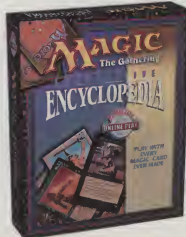
Since *Asheron's Call* is a game that only
allows online, multiplayer gaming play, the
most important parts of it are how well you
can relate to the other players, and can you
play without them killing you? The answers
are, complexly and yes. The rest of the game
is just gravy. The perspective is that of a sin-
gle character, which you can dress up in a
bunch of different classes and which can be
from one of four different human races. Charac-
ters have customizable skills and clothing.
All the items they carry appear on them for
other players to see. Once in the game, char-
acters are saved at the life stones. After death
they reappear there with most of their money,
weapons, experience, and magic still intact.
Blah, blah, blah, and so on and so on.

The point is that *Asheron's Call* is a fully
playable game set in an interesting and com-
plex world. It can be learned and played in
very short order. The fun of the game is the
other players that are loose in that world, and
your interaction with them.

Age of Wonders, (PC-Windows CD-ROM,
\$49.95) from Triumph Studios, is a less tradi-
tional Fantasy game. Instead of role-playing,
AoW is a turn-based wargame. Set in a
mythic, prehistorical Earth, the game has 12
playable races that can be matched in multi-
player games either player against computer
or head to head over the Internet or (and this
is really cool) via a play by e-mail mode. In
addition, there is a campaign game where
the player chooses to be either the light or the
dark elves and tries to conquer the world.

War is the focus of *Age of Wonders* and it is
in its tactical combat mode that the game is
at its best. The fighting is turn-based so that
you can give each unit its orders and let it
resolve them before you issue orders to the
next unit. This is nice when you really want
the enemy's sorcerer dead but you aren't
sure how much damage it is going to take to
kill him. You just keep throwing units at him
until he falls over, and then you move on to
the next priority. Each unit has its own
strengths and weaknesses and tendencies;
they can earn experience and get better as the
game goes on.

The strategic part of the game is far more
complex. Not only do players have to plot the
movement and development of each unit, but
they also have to look after their cities and
holdings, each of which has a morale and
production track that must be monitored and
maintained. Add to these details the complex
magic system, which includes a hundred
spells divided into seven spheres, many of
them with Strategic uses, and players' em-
pires rapidly become time consuming to
maintain. Which is the attraction of the play
by e-mail version. This option allows players
to do their turn, send it off, and get on with
their lives while the other player does his or
her turn, instead of sitting at the other end of
a modem, waiting. For modern players, the
game can be set to simultaneous turns, and



time limits can be imposed on turns.

Funnily enough, the key to *Age of Wonders* is the heroes. Like *Asheron's Call* (although in not nearly the detail), hero characters can be customized to the needs of the sort of war that the player wants to fight. Having characters with the right items or spells at the right place and the right time can be of more use than a full company of veteran elven archers. To achieve this, heroes have to be made to fight and adventure so they can store up the experience and items they will need.

Graphically *Age of Wonders* does not have the 3-D polygoned modern look of *Asheron's Call*, but then it doesn't demand every last resource of your computer either. The units are all inventively and (more important) distinguishably rendered, the animations are clever, and the backgrounds are detailed. If you want to fight the battles of a Fantasy world on a scale of armies rather than one of characters, *Age of Wonders* is the game that will let you do it, and have fun in the process.

Also out this month is the *Magic The Gathering® Interactive Encyclopedia* (PC-Windows CD-ROM, \$49.95) from Saltmine Creative Inc. The CD lets players browse or search through every card ever produced for MTG up to October of 1999, including the Mercadian Masques. Like any good interactive encyclopedia these days, online updates will be available as new cards are put out.

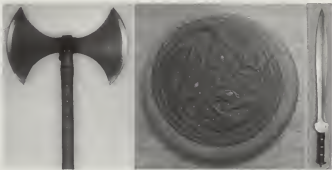
The electronic card images include the full text and the original artwork. All the game's rules, including all Oracle rulings, are on the CD. Many cards include background notes from Wizards of the Coast's R&D department. Players can search the database of cards by title of the card, text of the card, the flavor text, the artist, the casting cost, toughness, power, card color, card set, and special abilities. These criteria can be combined in any combination.

The *Interactive Encyclopedia* is also a tool for building and analyzing decks with the included deck builder. The builder presents a graphical representation of the balance of cards in a deck. The *Encyclopedia* will work on any deck and is useful for comparing the player's own against the tournament-winning decks that can be downloaded from the Wizards Web site. Players can input their collection into the program so they can track their cards with the collection manager tool. The manager also uses a price guide (that is also updatable from the Web) to determine the value of individual cards or the player's whole collection.

Even better, the *Interactive Encyclopedia* gives players access to a game room and virtual tabletops on the Wizard's server. Players can meet each other in the chatroom, then go to a table to play a game with any deck they have built using the *Encyclopedia*. The tabletop doesn't enforce any of the rules of the game, it just lets both players see and manipulate the cards. It is like playing the game for real, except that you have to type to talk and the cards are electric. ☛

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EDITORIAL

Continued from page 6

In the other eight stories, the two mythic heroes solve all of their problems by killing all of the bad guys. Two of the characters save themselves by quick action and quick thinking, but not very convincingly, since up to the moment when they begin to act, they are utterly unlikely and unprepossessing. Two of the characters save the day by doing what they are told, which requires a certain amount of courage and, in one case, sacrifice. In one story the hero does a lot of running around, and does think his way through one problem, but never accomplishes much. And one story is a joke.

In any case, I was wrong in my prediction about mindless violence, since only two of eight solutions fit that category. But my other four predictions were correct. And I think that says something about modern Science Fiction.

One final way in which these stories differ from those in *Astounding Science Fiction*, which I didn't predict. John W. Campbell, who these days I may need to identify as the Editor of *Astounding*, was laughed at for always insisting that when an earthman went up against an alien, the earthman won. In these stories, where there are aliens (four stories) the aliens are dominant. Always.

I'll add that to my list of predictions about *Year's Best SF 4*, which is now on sale, but which I have not yet read. Read it, and see for yourself how well my predictions hold up.

The new definition of Science Fiction seems to go something like this. Either take some minor change in present-day society and play around with it for a little while, in an uneventful narrative about ordinary people. Or do self-conscious, post-modern tropes on pulp themes, being careful to let the reader know you are a sophisticated adult and are only pretending.

As I said, some of the stories were very good. But the only story with new ideas, as contrasted with minor variations on old ideas, was the Wolfe. A year from now, I will probably remember only three of the stories: the Wolfe, the Egan, and the one that was memorably bad.

I am not a nostalgia-besotted derelict pining for a return of Ray Cummings and Richard Shaver. I can no more read the old pulps than I can most new paperback originals. What I can hunger for is SF that is both well written and also full of ideas, with interesting settings and memorable characters. Does good writing require small ideas, mundane settings, and dull characters? Why is the majority of short, nonmedia-related SF today composed in a minor key, with a humdrum plot and a downbeat ending? Who will follow in the footsteps of Lazarus Long, Hari Seldon, and Gully Foyle? *

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SCARLET

Continued from page 37

"And now," she said. "Imagine I were to say, I am here to show I am ready to be with you again."

"I would say, Sas-peth, that I won't have you."

"Even in your dreams? Even as a woman? Even in love?"

It was an awful thing to know, as Coor knew it, that to take to her again would be worse even than when he had been robbed of her.

Coor Krahn, in the dream, shut his eyes and commanded himself: "Wake now."

But when he opened his eyes, he was still in the dream with her. And now she stood naked, pale as ivory, her hair combed down and down.

"No, Sas-peth," he said, "it was Tyo you wished to have. Fill his dreams, not mine. Let him wear away his spirit on your edge. In all the lands, I never heard a story of one such as you. Did I shame you in combat? Did I fail you? Did I abuse the poor, insult the helpless? Was I a drunkard, a cheat, a coward—was I a weakling or an idiot? Or *unchaste*? Go out of my dream, you whore."

She turned away. It seemed to him then, in all his dreams of her, she had so often, just like this, turned from him, hiding, masking herself in his trust or his lust. Worse than that, in his respect for her.

"What life will you have," she said, "without me?"

"What life indeed."

"It was a passing desire," she said, head turned, strands of her fine hair blowing like smoke against the Moon. "A momentary, weightless thing, to be with that other one, to live another way. But only for a while, a little minute. And perhaps, I tested you." (He knew she lied.)

Bluntly he said, "What could he give you?"

"Nothing," she said softly, the woman Sas-peth.

"And that," said Coor Krahn, "is all now you will get from me."

Then she turned back, and she was beside him, lying against him on the dust, her arms wound round him and her lips on his. "I have been everything to you," she said. "I am your life."

"So you are. I see it now, Sas-peth. I'd thought I would have to die, and I was wrong in that."

He held her fast with his left arm, and with his right hand, drew up the old black genderless sword, which had come into the dream with him, as it seemed for this purpose. Coor Krahn drove the sword into her, up through her belly into her heart.

Her head curved back, and she looked at him, his Sword. She looked at him a long while, not speaking, until her eyelids fell like two white petals.

Raising his face from hers, Coor Krahn

saw a lion standing on the desert, the red Moon between its ears. Eventually it vanished, but Sas-peth Satch did not. She lay heavy as lead in his arm until he let her go, and woke at last.

With sunrise, he buried the black sword, as he had promised.

IN THE SWORD-SCHOOL OF CURHM-BY-Ocean, he was questioned all the days of three more months, terrible questions on and on, over and over. They examined his dreams too (in none of which did she appear). They drugged him and beat him and starved him and made him drunk. And in the end, when they were sure he had not lied, they made him well again, scoured out like a shell. That day he was brought a new Sword that had been made randomly for him, or for one in his predicament. It was one of only 12 hoarded at any given time, in a secret store against such a need as his own. Coor Krahn was told, and it was the elderly master who told him, so he should grasp it could not be false, that though it had not often come about, the thing which had happened with him, yet, along the years, still it was clandestinely known. He was not the only one to die this death.

The new Sword was male. It had no name, was his to name. It was a slave, not an empress, but a mighty slave, headstrong, gorgeous, and dangerous as that other slave who might rebel, fire.

Once Coor had come to know it, and wore it at his side, and walked with it, he met it in a dream. In the flesh it was himself, but younger, and a little less, and a little more crazy. It—he—laughed, the new Sword, clowning, amusing Coor. Coor Krahn called it, therefore, Coor's Brother.

Then the master took Coor Krahn half a mile down to a small room in the rock below the School's temple, and showed him a horrible thing, which was a line of narrow vitreous boxes. These were the graves of some 25 or 26 or—seven Swords, mostly broken in pieces. And the last of the metal corpses was Sas-peth Satch. But she was pierced tidily right through, not mutilated. She had kept her glamour. Even ruined, she was beautiful, peerless.

"He sent her here to us," the master said, "Lord Tyo Lionay. He found her lying so on his floor one morning. She'd cut him as she fell. He will always carry the scar. He knew enough to want her, and enough to know what had been done. He sent jewels with her, rubies and pearls. Removed, as you see. He begs your forgiveness."

"He will never have that," replied Coor Krahn, without interest. Then he said very low, "But is she dead? Yes. She's dead. I see she is. Sas-peth, better than rubies and pearls."

The sword shone, even without light. In memory he gazed again at the closing of her petal lids, her smooth hair poured in the dust. He murmured to himself, "Perhaps." ■



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WINTER KING

Continued from page 45

"Zavier, come back in."

"I don't feel cold anymore, Madri. I think I'm going to make it."

"You only think you don't feel cold because you're freezing to death," I said.

"Zavier, you'll die if you stay out here."

"Whatever God wills," he said.

"If you come inside, you might survive the night, and you can try to persuade Merik and the rest of the tribe, for as long as it takes. If you stay out here, you'll die. And everyone will assume you were a fraud."

"Not you," he said. "You believe. I know you do."

Zavier struggled to his knees. He wasn't shaking anymore, but he moved like someone who could barely feel his limbs. He held out his hand and touched my forehead; I realized he had melted some snow between his palms. I was surprised there was still enough warmth left in his hands to do that.

"I baptize you, Madri," he said. "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." He touched my cheek and smiled at me with his earnest blue eyes. Then he fell back into his cradle of snow.

"I was right about you," Luya said.

I turned. Luya had come out of the shelter; she was speaking to Zavier, not to me. She still didn't look cold, even in the wind; her hair whipped back from her face and she stared down mercilessly at Zavier.

"A great power *did* bring you here," she said.

Zavier's eyes were closed, and he didn't respond.

"The power that brought you to us was the Winter King," Luya said, striding toward us. "He brought you here to give us a message. He brought you as a warning." Luya grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me away from Zavier. "Zavier, you are a fool and a weakling. But there may be others in your clan who tell stories well and who can survive the night with ease—and look at the danger you alone have brought us! You've turned Madri—you nearly turned my father—and you were only one man, one weak, stupid man."

Zavier's eyes were still closed, and there was a hint of a smile on his face. I reached out a hand toward him, but Luya jerked me back.

"Of course you heard a voice. Of course you came here safely. Winter King!" she shouted, and raised her arms to the black sky. "Forgive me for doubting you. I understand! I understand now!"

Luya had released me, so I knelt beside Zavier in the snow. I touched his face and felt for a breath.

"He's dead," I said.

AND SO ZAVIER, THE CHILD OF JESUS, brought the Truth to the Children of the Winter King. Because of the Winter King's warning, Luya knew that the Seven Clans had to unite. After first Winter's night, I returned to the Shong clan—but Luya crossed the river and sought out Stavan Oneel, offering herself as his wife and his partner. In wine and water they mixed their blood and became one, and so the feud between the Oneel clan and the Shong clan was ended.

Through the winter, I practiced reading Zavier's Bible. I didn't understand all the words, and Zavier wasn't there to explain them to me—but reading did become easier, as Zavier had promised. I read the story of Moses, which Zavier had told us on first Winter's night, and the stories of many other weak people that Zavier's god had chosen.

I thought about Zavier in the darkness each night—about why he had come to us, and the power and faith that had sustained him. One of those nights, I realized something. Just as Zavier's god had chosen the weak along with the strong, so had the Winter King. The Winter King had given Zavier the strength and courage to come to us, even though Zavier didn't even worship Him. How much stronger could the Winter King make me, who believed in His power? The Winter King made Zavier strong because he was needed. Perhaps I, also, was needed. I realized that night how I could serve my people.

When spring came, I crossed the river and joined Luya and Stavan. Luya was surprised to see me, and for a moment I saw her old scorn—and then she saw the look on my face and waited for me to speak.

"You mean to unite the clans," I said, my head held high. "You will need me at your side."

Luya was dubious, but Stavan was no fool. He saw quickly how writing could help to solve some of the interminable, stupid feuds. Because of the Winter King's warning, we turned away the Children of Jesus who came to Mesota after Zavier; because of the Winter King's gift, we were able to unite the clans and fight together against the eaters of chaos from the south. Because of the Winter King's warning, His Children remained free. Because of the Winter King's gift, His Children will always be free.

Thus I set these words on paper, 50 winters after Zavier came to us. Let those who come after me know: The Winter King came to separate light from dark, water from snow, strong from weak. The Winter King came to bring order. As long as the Children of the Winter King accept His rule and His gifts, we shall always endure. As long as the Children of the Winter King remember His message and His warning, we shall remain free.

Ever and ever, world without end. Amen. ✠



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FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 27

archetypes, forming part of a literary tradition that runs from the prophetic trees in the magical adventures of Alexander the Great, through the "Wood of Suicides" in Dante's *Inferno*, to the Ents in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Macdonald's son-in-law, the Victorian painter Edward Burne-Jones and his fellow Pre-Raphaelite artists returned again and again to the Archetypal Forest in their paintings, poetry, and prose—including the classic Fantasy novel *The Wood Beyond the World* by Burne-Jones' great friend William Morris. As the century turned, Celtic Twilight writers such as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats found magic in the twilight woods with which to fuel their art. In the early 20th century, writers such as Hope Mirrlees (*Lud in the Mist*), James Stephens (*Crack of Gold*), and Lord Dunsany created modern mythic tales to explore the woodlands that lie (to borrow Dunsany's phrase) "beyond the fields we know."

Then, of course, the Inklings came along (Tolkien, Lewis, and Charles Williams), profoundly influencing much of the magical literature that has been written since. It is the challenging task of modern fantasists to assimilate the works produced by these great writers (Tolkien in particular), while avoiding the pitfall of merely producing pale imitations of it. Modern writers who have managed this most successfully (Alan Garner, Ursula Le Guin, Philip Pullman) are those familiar with the mythic source material which the past Masters used to such great effect—as well as those for whom a strongly personal vision shines through Professor Tolkien's long shadow.

Neil Gaiman is a good example of a modern fantasist whose work is never derivative, even when he gives a tip of the hat to Dunsany, Mirrlees, and Christina Rossetti, as in his charming new novel *Stardust*. This story, set in an English woodland at the Wall separating our world from faerie land, reads like a classic 19th-century story yet is utterly fresh and original. *Stardust* began as a collaborative work—first published in narrative graphic form with enchanting paintings by Charles Vess (whose art is profiled elsewhere in this issue). The woodland created by this talented pair is not a Generic Fantasy Forest—through Neil's clever yet gentle prose, and Charles's Arthur Rackham-like pictures, these woods are specifically English and yet archetypal, filled with true magic. The spirit of the woodlands is also a captivating presence in the Japanese animated film *Princess Mononoke*, with its English screenplay adapted by Neil Gaiman—a deeply mythic work in which all the power and terror of the Archetypal Forest is brought vividly to life. Robert Holdstock is a writer who has traveled deeper into the woods than any other modern fantasist, and the books of his

Mythago Wood sequence are Must Reading for anyone interested in the subject. Charles de Lint writes interstitial works that bring the potent archetypes of the mythic woods into modern urban settings, as in his novels *Memory and Dream*, *Greenmantle*, and *Moonheart*. In *The Wild Wood*, inspired by the art of Brian Froud, Charles takes us deep into the woods of northern Canada—a prismatic landscape where magic and madness waits, as in shamanic tales of old. The woodlands of Patricia A. McKillip's tales are some of the finest in Fantasy literature; I recommend her novels *Winter Rose* and *The Book of Atrix Wolfe* in particular, as well as her unusual contemporary story *Stepping from the Shadows*. I also recommend the Imaginary World novels of Sean Russell (such as *World Without End* and *Sea Without a Shore*); *The Green Man* by Kingsley Amis, an intriguing mystery set in modern East Anglia; and *The Corn King and Spring Queen* by Naomi Mitchison, a classic work of mythic fiction which draws heavily upon the folklore studies of Frazer and other scholars.

Visual artists have also been caught by the powerful spell of the Archetypal Forest. Charles Vess, Robert Gould, Thomas Canty, Alan Lee, and Brian & Wendy Froud are all artists well known in our field who have found inspiration deep in the woods. These artists and others have contributed work to an online exhibition of Green Man imagery in the Gallery section of the Endicott Studio Web site (address below). I also recommend art books on the work of English sculptors Andy Goldsworthy (*Wood*) and Peter Randall-Page (*Granite Song*), as well as the Scottish photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper (*Between Dark and Dark* and *Dreaming the Goldstard*). Recommended nonfiction: *Green Man* by William Anderson, *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization* by Robert Pogue Harrison, *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer, *Practice of the Wild* by Gary Snyder, and *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram.

In the close of his informative book on Green Man symbolism, William Anderson reminds us that this mysterious creature has altered over the centuries—changing along with our cultural perception of forests and the wilderness (as we moved from an ancient animist relationship with nature to a position of dominion over it). Williams ties the recent popularity of the Green Man with the rise of the modern ecology movement. He notes: "Our remote ancestors said to their mother Earth, 'We are yours.' Modern humanity has said to Nature, 'You are mine.' The Green Man has returned as the living face of the whole earth so that through his mouth we may say to the universe, 'We are one.'" ■

Terri Windling is the author of A Midsummer Night's Faery Tale, The Raven Queen, The Wood Wife, and other books. The complete, unedited versions of previous Folkroots columns by Terri and Heinz Insu Fenkl can be found on the Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts Web site: www.endicott-studio.com

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